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ECHOES FROM THE  
COUNTIES.





# *ECHOES*

*FROM THE*

# *COUNTIES*

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*Audi alteram partem.*

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# ECHOES

FROM THE

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### CHAPTER I.

DAWN.



MORNING is the most blissful time—no other hours are so beneficent as the early hours of a bright May morning. But the earliest dawning—that silent time before sunrise, when morn's grey eyelids open dimly, is indescribably sad the caller air creeping down from the lonely wolds chills the night-watcher to the bone, and there seems to exhale from the dark uneasily awakening earth a reluctant sigh of anguish.

Life begins in sorrow! The busy creatures of the night—the hedgehog, the badger, and the roving dog-fox, the nocturnal moths, the owl, the jibbering waders in the marsh; dryads, fairies, all the shadowy forest folk who in these days elude the eye of man, have slunk to rest; there is a pause; the great wheel of life hangs motionless, or spins on in solemn silence, while mother Nature utters mysterious groans in the travail of a new birth. This is the silent hour of Dawn, awful as night and death, yet instinct with the life of a New Day!

How interesting to trace the striking analogy between the Dawn of day and the Beginnings of human life ! The cold grey break of day, the puling years of infancy, the primitive races of mankind, are akin ; they are the embryo states, to which we return no more. The beams of the newly-risen sun, gilding only the mountain-tops, the careless years of light-hearted youth, the superficial polish of the Greek type of civilisation—these again sustain the same remarkable correlation. In the beginning of things man's place in the slowly evolving Cosmos was so insignificant that little or no trace of his presence remains—countless æons of old time are lapsed into the record of a span ; the recognisable outcome of it the mere attainment of physical perfection or perfectibility. Ages more crept on of semi-brutal existence, men spent their lives in securing food, or in devious wanderings to fresh lands ; but of the works of these primitive Folk traces remain in Great Britain in wild spots and on lonely hills, while faint survivals of some of their customs, even, may be discerned at the present day among the simplest of our rural populations. As the rate of human advancement attained greater rapidity, its developments also became more complex ; many nations attained to the promise of a glorious youth, but thereafter died, bequeathing only their tale of history as a legacy to posterity. The one problem which no civilisation has yet solved, is the bestowal of culture upon the whole mass of the people. Partial civilisations—the polished refinement of the few, the servile debasement of the many—have ever concealed beneath a hectic glow, as of youth, the fatal seeds of decay and untimely death !

We—the great English-speaking people—inherit the

bright example of their excellences ;—are we also secure in the power to work out a nobler Salvation ? If so, indeed, then are we, far from being as some would have us believe the effete possessors only of an over-ripe civilisation, in very truth the Sons of the Morning : that true morning illumined by the clear rays of the risen sun which shines brighter and brighter towards the perfect day. It is the high office of the meridian sun to gladden with his glorious beams and warm into vigorous life the lowly valleys and the quiet plains. On those quiet plains and broad lower levels, our humbler brethren, the Work-folk and the Labourers, a teeming population, pass their sordid lives ;—to brighten their lot and improve their condition must be the chiefest work of a righteously advancing civilisation. To aid in this great work, in however slight a degree and in however humble and restricted a sphere, should be a useful task ;—which task we timidly essay.

As we find embedded in the low floors of caves disjointed relics of older worlds, so in the lower strata of society in quiet nooks unvexed by the fiercer currents of civilisation we discover survivals of quaint customs, gleams of poetry and fragments of romance. The pleasures of local antiquarian pursuits, the charms of rural scenery, field sports, and natural history are keenly relished by our fellow-countrymen ; a more genial appreciation of the humble folk who wear out, amid such untasted (?) pleasures, all their uneventful lives in labour alone is wanting. We are too prone to laugh at the awkwardness of our brother whom we contemptuously style "*Hodge*," to shrink from close contact with the dirt which disguises him, and to leave him while he is patient and submissive, unhelped and uncheered ; but

a wiser philosophy would utilise his good qualities so as to enable him, guided by judicious legislation, to help himself. The signs are apparent of a brighter day just breaking for our humbler fellow countrymen; its gleaming promise cannot prove abortive, unless, alas! there be latent in our economy a fatal defect foreign to the genius of the Anglo-Saxon race, a conclusion—let us devoutly hope—too monstrous to be entertained!

That the attention of brighter and wiser men than those whose vision is obscured by narrow local and class prejudices, should be directed to Local and Rural affairs is absolutely necessary; yet nothing could be more disastrous than any attempt to progress by leaps and bounds. Social amelioration, like liberty, is a plant of slow growth. That our labouring population, both rural and urban, is deteriorating must I fear be granted; yet all that may be safely done by legislation can but initiate a better state of things—all else must be left to time and the healing influence of a better mutual understanding between classes. Sympathy alone can secure union between the Labourer and those above him, and there can be no real sympathy without that interchange of *special knowledge* which begets mutual confidence. It follows therefore that but a few are in possession of the *Open sesame* to a labourer's heart!

The pleasant bonds which once bound the servile classes to their lords, as a favourite horse is bound to his rider, are snapt asunder, and not all the skill of all the Law-tinkers in Christendom can re-unite them. The rider is unhorsed and ruffled; the horse is cutting awkward capers; now the

physician (not the horse-breaker) must step forward ;—he can utter soothing phrases to the discomfited rider, but how shall he *talk horse* to the horse ? It is in such a crisis that a master faculty prevails. There are natures endowed with a divine mother-wit, who, without any previous special technical training, can win the love and service of whomsoever it is their mission to influence ; they are the men who work miracles ! I have known personally many who could venture quite safely to “crack o’ pleughs an’ kine” to the critical ploughman, but only one, or at most two, who could also give the results of such intercourse to the public. Borrow among the gypsies exercised mysterious influence ; Burns, had he lived longer, might have done more for rustic Scotland ; but the agrarian agitation in England of 1872 and subsequent years has produced only one true Labourer capable of commanding the public ear.

Of the thousands who have the knowledge, most are dumb ; of those who are eloquent, how few possess the essential knowledge ! Yet while this gracious attribute is so rare, nothing is more common than a bald imitation of it ; such, perforce, is the stock-in-trade of many an honest Country Parson in his dealings, more or less profitable, with his humbler parishioners. The good man hugs to his benevolent soul the belief that oft as he has drawn his bow at a venture he has pierced hearts sometimes, and yet, in truth, never once has he shot a barb into the gold !

None more shrewdly detects *acting* than your labourer, none more stolidly acts a part himself. How often such a little scene as the following is enacted. Some goody-goody person, a kind-hearted wealthy maiden lady suppose—though why the silly parts should be given to

old maids is hard to understand when there are so many other actors capable of playing them—sets out upon a “round of visits” to the poor. Arrived at a labourer’s cottage, and wishing devoutly to be humble and meek, she leaves her cosy basket-carriage in charge of her groom and herself knocks at the cottage door; she waits nervously though she hears the gruff “Come in!” for it sounds forbidding to her ear, and is admitted, after some delay, formally, by little Mary with a dame-school curtsy. If you are to the manner born, you should scarcely wait to be invited before you lift the latch: the cottage door remote from towns is free as the tent-flap of the Arab, and it is well to remember that the apparent surliness of your humble friend is merely a species of rough honesty. As the visitor steps into the small “living-room,” the “man” (for he is at home temporarily on the club) rises and smooths his forelock, the missus dusts and draws to the fireplace a chair, always the highest backed one,—survival of the usages of old days when the post of honour was the chimney-corner screened from keen draughts by the high settle. It is well if you have the happy knack of noticing appreciatively these reverential observances without at once accepting them; you perceive the missus has been making bread, the man watching the “tatie diggin’” or the “pig killin’.” Ramble on a little about bread or potatoes or pigs, and if you understand these occult subjects, passing successfully your preliminary “exam.,” you will presently be rewarded with a real hearty, “Now do’e sit down ma’am!” You have gained a foothold within the lines, and may proceed to unstrap your wallet of trifles, or unmask your battery of heavy artillery, according to the

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real object of your advances. But our gentle friend assumes the chair with the serene consideration of a charitable duchess ; missus, keenly alive to the situation, replies with a ready display of almost abject humility, she plucks down her apron, glances critically at the fire-irons, and in her mildest vinegar manner, tells Mary, in a stage whisper, she "mustn't look at *the lady* like that now!" Missus' sharp reproofs always partake of the flavour of vinegar ; not cruel enough for vitriol, nor quite brisk enough for acid. The lady thinks she is getting on very nicely ; missus, in her inmost heart, only wishes she would come to the point. Then the man is assailed with sundry propositions about the weather, to all of which he gives unqualified assent, causing thereby some slight chagrin which almost breaks in ripples on the placid brow of the lady ; for these propositions, by a benevolent artifice, were purposely designed to be somewhat contradictory that he might display himself, whereas he breaks down lamentably, and thinks (not speaks), "'t isn't for the likes o' me to argue wi' quality folk" ; so, really weather-wise as he is he softly accepts any kind of prognostication from the lady. And now, the right frame of mind being induced, the kind lady piously opens the inevitable Bible, at sight whereof all the family—man, missus, Mary, and all the little ones, down to the precocious infant—assume a devout demeanour ; they fold their hands in rapt attention, and "dada" pushes his pipe—which he laid by on the entrance of the lady—still further from him, indicating in dumb show his readiness to renounce all the poms and vanities of this wicked world. The chapter, made wearisome by unseasonable iteration, is listened to with reverent attention, missus emitting an



occasional mild sigh and persuading herself that the chapter is doing "our *dada* a deal o' good," even the precocious infant sitting bolt upright submissive to the end—which he knows will bring comforts. That final stage is presently reached, there is a parting display of gracious condescension on the one side, and of humility not to be outdone on the other; little Mary "bops" to the floor as she closes the latch behind the visitor, and then—Well, *then* there is no indulgence in vulgar ridicule within the cottage; these humble folk are gentlemen and ladies after a fashion, almost as good, perhaps, as that of the benevolent lady herself; each honestly believes the other has received a blessing, and as for the good lady, if they met her at a village tea or rural *fête*, they would cheer lustily in her honour, or at any time do her any other small chance service that might lie in their power to do. So the children devour the sweetmeats, the missus thinks she'll see after the bread, and the man gazes into vacancy somewhere midway between the table and the ceiling with a face so blandly void the greatest master of physiognomy might fail to read in it the slightest index to his mind; but he *has* a "mind," and thereon he ruminates as he resumes his pipe! Meanwhile the good-natured lady has regained her pony-carriage; her face beams, her heart is full of thankfulness that she has been able to do good to those poor people, so tractable and so evidently impressed; and she rattles cheerfully away, serenely assured they will be longing for the day when they shall see her again.

Nevertheless, through all this placid little bit of high comedy there has been no touch of nature;—the lady could not say, *Open sesame!*

This swallowing of bread-pills for colocynth, and display of Dutch metal or occasional silver-gilt for gold, cannot be prevented, nor, perhaps, is there any need it should be ; it will die a natural death some day when the world shall have grown wiser—about what time the little birds shall have begun to talk, and our descendants to fly ! Yet, if the energy now expended in District visiting, Bible reading, Elementary schooling, Village clubs, Charities, Concerts, could be made a little more practical, with results a little more making for progress—onward if possible, but sideways, backward even, rather than this eternal standing still—how much better for *all* concerned it would be !

There is a doubt often comes tugging at one's heart whether the sweet scenes so enchanting to us are pleasant to the poor people whose lives they surround ; and here, I fear, a saddening admission must be made : though that the labouring hind has the capacity to appreciate the beauties of Nature I thoroughly believe.

I knew a peasant once, type of an admirable class fast becoming positively extinct. He could neither read nor write, and had not one tittle of education save such as had come to him through a life-long course of observation ; of the whole world and of all human knowledge, beyond the narrow compass of his own personal experience, he was profoundly ignorant ; yet to talk to him was almost always pleasant and sometimes instructive. It is such men as he was who serve to point a moral for the bigoted opponents of Education for the Poor ; but those narrow-minded persons do not think how such rare sprack-wit would have fared if aided by sound school instruction in early life. John Cole—"Old Cole" as his familiars called him—had

been bailiff, or head-man, to a parson of the old high school, who farmed his own glebe, on a fat Norfolk living, at a time when country parsons commonly farmed their own glebe, and, as ordained by law, collected their tithes in kind. It was one of Cole's multifarious duties to collect these tithes, which he did in a superior light waggon drawn by three trotting horses, the driver standing firmly behind the thill horse, handling his long reins and smacking his pliant whip in a way to secure the admiration of the village loungers, and also—which was of far more practical importance—to strike terror into the obdurate breasts of recalcitrant farmers. When word arrived at the Rectory that farmer Le-Grys, for instance, was carting barley it behoved John Cole to be off swing-trot ; for if they cleared the field before the Tithe-man had personally judged the heaviness of the crop, there might be bitter wordy war over the few forlorn sheaves left standing for the parson. That village community had its great feuds—as a century ago what village community had not?—and parson P—and 'Squire D—— hated and abused each other with the virulence of Hector and Achilles. At their combats all minor disputants—yeomen hinds and farmers' wives—stood aghast and silent ! In isolated communities small affairs assume remarkable proportions. A truce had been mysteriously proclaimed, which the village gossips heralded, but still declared, with many expressions of amazement, to be unnatural and wicked ; while the good parson, more ignorant of the origin of it than the gossips themselves, fondly hoped, yet doubted there might be some truth at the bottom of the rumour ;—but, alas ! it was merely an artful stratagem on the part of the 'Squire, leading up to a cruel joke.

A breathless messenger suddenly arrived at the Rectory one morning to say the 'Squire was taking in a crop, and the parson must send for his tithe;—what could it be? so early in June the grass could surely not yet be cut, and any other crop was out of the question. However, the newly-promoted peace must not be jeopardised: so Cole briskly mounted his tall chariot, and driving his three smoking steeds at headlong speed rushed thundering and clattering up to the Hall; where, alas! he soon learnt to his intense disgust that the crop was *strawberries*!—'Squire D—— personally assuring him, in his most courtly manner, the gardener had just gathered one hundred Early Scarlets, out of which ten small berries were the Parson's legal share! Honest Cole, not to be out-done, coolly placed the tiny cabbage-leaf containing *the tithe* in his huge waggon, and bore it off in triumph!

Cole spent his boyhood in the northern part of the county of Suffolk, and could remember the Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) being not uncommon in that locality. He used to relate how he had seen the unwieldy birds run into by greyhounds; the chosen method being to conduct the stalk behind the brow of a rounded hill, slipping the dogs from the summit to rush down suddenly on their quarry; the early morning, when the dew was on the grass, and the Bustards chilly and sluggish, being the time affording the best chance of success.

There was *character* in the way the old servitor wore his hair—cheeks and chin clean shaved, while the thick pelt of iron-gray hair upon his crown was cropped short almost to the scalp, with just a suspicion of a tonsure fringing the

temples and forehead ; evidently a combination of the modes brought over by William the Conqueror and St. Augustine, or at least a distinct survival of the fashion of Queen Elizabeth's day. On the eve of hair-cutting time, there would be manifestations of uneasiness on the part of the old gentleman such as might be displayed by a crab about to cast its shell, which would continue for some days, and until such time as a secret compact had been duly entered into for the services of a discreet male friend, whereupon the pair would secure themselves in a solitary bed-room, and there practise the barber's art and mystery in a manner known only to the initiated. Another seldom recurring occasion, for the due solemnization of which the solitude of the bed-room was indispensable, was when a new coat had to be made. This was an irksome duty an easier conscience might have shunned ; but the old gentleman was possessed by a quiet pride in a good coat which permitted no compromise. Worn always of one colour and one cut, his coats, though considered good, were yet, with curious care, concealed on all days save Sundays and high holidays beneath the folds of a long white "slop." For the serious business of the coat-making no fussy woollen-draper's nor smug *shop*-tailor's aid was sought ; there was in the village a discreet elderly youth, a peripatetic tailor, whose business consisted of an endless round of jobs at lone farm-houses—the custom being for "Snip" to find thimble and thread, his employer stuff and buttons—and he it was to whom the old gentleman confided his designs in the matter of the projected coat. On the morning at last definitely fixed upon after anxious negotiation the tailor would arrive, with a depre-

catory look about his face, and a frouzy bag under his arm wherein was his goose and some other implements of the sartorial trade, his whole personality prevaed by a strictly professional smell, not unlike the dissipated odour of burnt green-baize. With this condescending artificer at his heels the old gentleman would ascend the stairs, and forthwith enter the sacred chamber ; but as thereupon a jealous lock secured them, further proceedings can only be surmised. The patent facts were, that food and beer for the man were carried up-stairs by the master in quantities regulated strictly as per agreement, that the man stole down at night and left as silently as he had come, and that about the morning of the second day the goose had to be made hot. When the third day came, those whose curiosity induced them to mark such small particulars might discern that the stiff grey collar peeping from beneath the slop on Master Cole's shoulders was no longer old but new. It is believed that all the coats the old man ever wore, from early manhood until he finally took to his bed, were made from *one* roll of hodden-grey cloth, purchased at some Fair with the savings of the earliest tithe-bailiff years, and which was kept under lock and key in an old carved-oak coffer ; that the first coat served as the pattern for the next, and so on in perennial succession ; and that a small remnant of the once huge roll unexhausted at the old gentleman's death was gravely disposed of in accordance with an " item " in his will !

In matters which he believed he understood, John Cole was as unbending as the rugged stem of an oak ; and in nothing was he more uncompromising than in his tenacious observance of the " Old Style"—old Christmas Day, old

New-Year's Day, old Candlemas, Lady Day, Michaelmas, all were sacredly remembered, and a subtle instinct derived from habitual observation of the weather enabled him to point comparisons not always complimentary to those who settled the New Calendar.

This good old man's delicate appreciation of all the various changes of the seasons, and of the ever-shifting aspects of rural affairs, showed how keen was the enjoyment he derived from the careful conduct of his own legitimate business. To hear him dilate upon these matters, which indeed was a favour seldom vouchsafed, was not only to learn the dry facts of an ever-lengthening calendar, but to gain an insight into a hidden well of genuine poetic feeling, none the less true because almost inarticulate,—it was when some great storm or severe snow-fall or frost had to be described that grim scintillations of bardic fire burst forth! He never went to bed—the time generally about nine o'clock—until he had first gone out o'door, gazed up into the sky, watched the moon and the stars, and carefully noted which way the wind blew. I think it was *then* he used to say his prayers, for I once came suddenly upon him, standing silent in a shadowy corner of the moonlit yard with an awful expression on his upturned face! Very early in the morning he would be up again prowling about, and noting every little change the night had wrought. "There's no air like th' marnen'," he would say; and at eighty years of age he might be seen at sunrise, with his shoulders still square and his limbs firm set, his hat doffed, his weather-beaten face turned reverently towards the east, and his left palm softly stroking down his forehead while he complacently inspired the "marnen'" air.

Long, long ages before, when churches and tithes were not, possibly the remote progenitors of Cole were sun-worshippers; and at a time less distant his ancestors doubtless tended their flocks and herds beneath the midnight stars!

Now, so far as it can be reckoned a factor, school-teaching stood in the sum total of John Cole's education for nought; we must place him, in respect of *that*, just on an equality with a Soudan Negro, and far inferior to many of the caddish young labourers we now see around us.

How is this?

The present generation have had the benefit of the three R's, and something more; our excellent old friend never had; yet, as a man, how infinitely superior he was, how much wealthier in that which adds dignity and character to manhood—the faculty of acquiring knowledge and applying it to the practical affairs of life.

The plain truth is, the poorer classes get, in childhood, under our present transition system some elementary school-teaching, but every bit of colour is washed out of their subsequent lives—there is no stir—no healthy change whatever;—gone is the wood-craft and herd-craft of Saxon times; the oft-recurring festivals ordained by the wise Fathers, and kept as holidays by their children through mediæval centuries; the jocund shouts upon the village-green of Elizabethan days; and all we have to replace them is that greatest, wisest, best bequest of the stern spirits who carried Reform and perfected Steam—the village Beer House!

Not in the history of the world is there record of any



life more sordid than that of the English Agricultural Labourer at the present day. There may be, and doubtless there are, exceptions—I speak of the common run of agricultural labourers, and more especially of such as herd in the mean outskirts of small country towns: a class divorced from the kindly compensations of free fields, penned at night in slums as vile as the vilest in teeming cities, and relegated to a life of servile toil chequered only by spells of aimless loafing, with which it were idle to compare the lot of the un-emancipated nigger—held to hard drudgery by the lash, it is true, but left his shining skin and light laughter after labour,—the which (unlike the horrid ale-bench slang) it need not curdle one's blood to hear!

That this class shares, with the highest in the land, the inestimable benefits conferred by our constitution and laws, need not be said—but those benefits are general, and there is something more demanded for this humble class, whose personal condition—social and moral—needs a particular and a kindlier touch.

And it is indeed time a heartier philosophy were at work! Some definite ideas, tending practically towards the amelioration of our humble brothers' lot, may presently be suggested,—yet, for a while, let us linger over the idle weeds and way-side flowers, if so, perchance, discourse of their modest delights may allure some wiser spirits, confirm some gentler souls, to trudge, with benevolent intent, along these humble bye-ways.

## CHAPTER II.

### CHIAR'-OSCURO.



**S** your carriage enters the tunnel, draw up the window if you wish to avoid being choked by sulphurous vapour or blinded by scorix; and, sitting still and dumb, notice while the rattling train labours along its subterranean course how interminable appears the lapse of time from the first plunge into darkness until you suddenly emerge into light again; or, sitting alone ensconced in your favourite corner, throw down the sash, accustom your eyes to the gloom and note the many objects as you pass along: a solitary lamp suspended on the slimy wall—then the glass insulators of the telegraph wires, one, two, three, four, till you tire of counting them—then another lamp—anon a shadowy policeman bolt upright with his back against the wall—then more insulators—another lamp—insulators again—a group of plate-layers, interrupted in their work, laughing, huddled together out of danger—another lamp, and below it the rude cross painted on the masonry marking the spot where a solitary wretch, weary of life, sank down to embrace under the grinding wheels a horrible death—more insulators—lamps—insulators until the mind grows weary keeping count of all the dull inci-

dents upon the gloomy journey. Even as the slow passage of the train through the long tunnel so is the interminable roll of human history.

But let us take an exterior view :—as you rein up your horse on the crown of the viaduct and peer through the low-crowned archway just below, you can scarcely believe it is the tunnel you are looking at end-wise—a low-browed archway black as night, and in the centre a disc of light ; stretch out your hunting-crop and your friend at the other end in the disc of light can grasp it—so it appears, but in reality, near as he seems, there is a long mile of darkness between you and him !

Some such sensation (as I have attempted to describe) possesses me as standing here on this bleak hill-side near the rude cave—sepulchre or dwelling—the quarrymen have exposed, I look upon these few crumbling bones and the black ashes of a deserted fire ;—I stretch out my hand through the ages of primeval darkness and grasp my melancholy brother,—the rogue ! this is the broiled hog's-bone he picked last night, and the hyena's tooth has scored it since. He slips away like a ragged ghost from my grasp, and I start to find how unlike—yet how like—the fashion of these days he is ! Is it possible that ages before the earliest written history began this man was ? Is he indeed a man ?—so wolf-like in aspect, so ape-like in form ! There is at least a saddened satisfaction in the thought that, looking at *him*, we may congratulate ourselves upon substantial proof the human race has made some progress !

A long chain binds us to our primitive brother, yet

almost every discoverable link in it may be traced through the life-story of our Island Home ; customs and beliefs not yet extinct, and recently flourishing among us, had their obscure life-germs engendered in those remote ages when this man wandered a semi-brutal savage over the soil we now tread. Our English scenes bring before the mind's eye entrancing effects of *chiar'oscuro* ! Primitive man could not fail to be a sun-worshipper. Imagination pictures the leader of a slender tribe as he crawls shuddering and shuffling from his clammy lair—what time the dawn-smitten fog-wreaths begin to drift away across the fen—eagerly intent on gaining, as the level beams strike it, the dry eminence of yonder mound, followed by his œdematose wives with their bivering \* broods around them, all hastening with uplifted hands to adore the Bright Presence arising in awful splendour, not only to give warmth to their naked bodies, but to drive away with his flaming sword the sooty terrors of the night. Just such a man as fancy paints the archaic savage I saw emerge from a vagrant-ward only yesterday !—the mangey hair, the simiaoid gait, everything in keeping save the greasy rags and the modern blasphemy.

The sun was the chief source not only of light and warmth but of vital energy to the cowering wretches of foggy climes. The Esquimaux of our day may brave a keener degree of cold, but he has the kindly covering of thick snow to burrow under, while the early dwellers in the raw climate of Britain, amid primeval swamps and horrid

\* Shuddering as with cold, but with an added sense of helplessness as in children when their teeth chatter and they hang their hands loose from the upturned wrist.

thickets, must have braved hardships which the glow of occasional sunshine alone enabled them to bear. All through the middle ages down to the time of our Elizabethan poets the survival of a kind of sun-worship may be traced. I see it even now among the labouring poor of Dorset villages. The first warm day in spring is a white-stone day,—the people turn out of their cottages moved by a common impulse, the aged sit silent gazing at the sun, the women toss aside their gloving and gather in a sunny nook to rub their elbows and gossip, the lazy fellows who are always out of work find out a sheltered wall and wallow at its base ; all of them have forgotten sun-worship and most of them neglect to thank God, but they suck (on such a day) a genial actinic influence through every pore of their skin.

Near a spot where the boundaries of three counties meet there is a well-known group of ancient excavations called "Pen-pits," which—however speculative opinions may vary as to the origin and initial use of them—cannot but convey to the mind of the thoughtful observer one vivid and paramount impression, evolving a just conception of the rude almost bestial condition of those poor barbarians who originally constructed and made use of such holes in the earth. The entire area of land originally occupied by this primitive settlement was probably two or three hundred acres and covers the slope or table land on each side a slight ravine or valley, along which now runs the boundary line between the counties of Somerset and Wiltshire, joined at no great distance by the northern angle of Dorsetshire. The lower ground comprised within this area—where now a runnel of water creeps through rushes and weeds along the bed of the little

valley—would in primeval times be marsh or bog, while the upper lands or bordering slopes, where alone the pits are excavated, would be as they are now almost perfectly dry. The soil of the upper ground is a sandy loam, rather plastic but easy to work, containing a large proportion of flints and soft yellowish coloured stones with occasional fragments of harder green-sandstone, the whole being in a loose disordered dislocated condition, presenting the appearance of alluvial deposit, although none of the stones are water-worn. A part of the original area on the Wiltshire side has been levelled and is now arable land; another considerable portion is formed into plantation; while of the remaining space (still retaining comparatively its pristine appearance) a large part is under process of reformation, as the pits are being quarried for road materials and gradually filled in and levelled; but still some hundreds of the rude excavations remain undisturbed save by the crumbling touch of Time, in much the same condition as when first scooped out by the Troglodytes—our ancestors—two thousand years ago!

There are two forms of these pits which may be classified as the simple and the compound. The simple pit is an excavation scooped out of the earth in the form of a basin or hollow hemisphere, about fifteen feet in diameter, and now about from four-and-a-half to five feet in gross depth, the bottom being somewhat filled up by the gradual accumulation of *débris* dribbling down from the sides; but the gross depth is due to the result of the excavation having been thrown up all round in the form of a rough bank or encircling mound, so that the pit is partly in and partly out of the earth, the rim standing up above the original natural

surface nearly as much as the actual excavation is below it. Just on this principle the rifleman of to-day forms his extempore shelter pit—the earth he scoops out with his bayonet being flung up in front as a rampart. The theory which claims these excavations to have been human dwellings is strongly supported by the form of the single pit, the idea being that the pit formed the foundation of a conical roof, which might have been of boughs of trees, or of poles covered with reeds or the dried skins of animals killed in the chase. It is absolutely necessary with such a roof in our wet climate—as everybody knows practically who has been under canvas—to provide for the safe discharge of the rain water running down from the sloping sides, and the outer earth rim of the simple or single pit would ensure such a provision admirably. The pits, which dot the surface of the ground very thickly, are at the nearest part of their periphery about nine or ten feet asunder, and along the centre of the intervening mound the adjacent rims would originally form a sort of channel or gutter into which the eaves might drip, discharging the effluent into the wider intercalary spaces, where in this loose soil the rain water would soak away and so effectually prevent the pits from being flooded. But the pits are not all of the simple form nor of the moderate diameter of fifteen feet ; there is one large simple pit fifty feet diameter and about thirteen feet deep, with the encircling bank three or four feet above the natural level of the soil, and it is hard to believe such a wide space could have been spanned in any way, much less conically roofed over, by any such carpentry as the Earth-dwellers would be capable of doing ; nor can it be conceived why a

single pit of such large dimensions should be excavated for a dwelling place. Without a roof it is obvious such a place would be uninhabitable in wet weather, and in dry afford no better shelter than the open country. There is a natural sequence in all our styles of house-building—from the awkwardly constructed lead gutter of the Georgian era back to the high-pitched wooden roof of the Hall of the Saxon earl, provision has always of necessity been made for defence from the pelting rain ; even the rude Cave Dweller excavated his dry burrow in a hill-side, above the reach of flood ; and there is nothing to lead to the supposition that the builders of Pen-pits were compelled by some strange aberration to set at nought the teachings both of tradition and experience. This simple or single pit of fifty feet diameter, upon the supposition that it formed the basis of a human dwelling, certainly lands one in difficulties ; which become greater in connection with the compound pits. The compound pit, of which form there are many examples remaining, consists of one large excavation from sixty to sixty-five feet diameter across the longest axis, with smaller pits or indentations comprised within its concavity ; some contain two such indentations, some three, some four. The outline of these large compound pits in almost every instance is irregular, adapting itself apparently to fit in with the position of adjoining pits, and such irregular outline militates very strongly against the notion that the excavation ever was or ever was intended to be covered by any kind of roof ; rather it points to the supposition that the ground was very precious, and so that no part of it might be left unexplored was thus closely honey-combed, probably by miners ; each individual or party



working a separate claim, as is done even to this day by gold-diggers in Australia and California. Where the large excavation contains two sub-excavations or indentations, one of them is shallow and round, the other deeper and occasionally less regular in outline ; where there are three sub-excavations two are shallow and round, the other deeper ; where there are four, three are shallow and round, the other deeper. Were the large pits primarily formed as human dwellings, each small sub-excavation might have been the hollow base of a hut, and the encircling excavation would in that case act admirably as a general drain or carrier for superfluous moisture, and as a safeguard against the effects of storm or flood ; but such a theory, interesting as it may be as indicating primordial powers of design, cannot be accepted with the patent fact before us that the simple and compound pits were coeval, and that the simple pit with its encircling rim and conical roof would as effectually as the compound protect its inmates from the weather while costing them far less labour in construction ; nor is there anything to warrant the supposition that the necessity for guarding against storm or flood could have been so paramount, especially in this locality, as to override all other considerations. The conclusion therefore on a view of all the existing indications seems almost inevitable that the compound pits never could have been primarily intended for human habitations ; and if not the compound, then why the simple ?

There is one theory which may be plausibly advanced, and which if acceptable sheds a most interesting light upon the habits and modes of life of the aborigines of this country. The loose soil at Pen-pits contains an immense

quantity of fractured flints near the surface, and lower down dislocated beds or fragmentary layers of green-sandstone. To chip flints into the shape required for arrow-heads, spear-heads, and axes must have been a wearisome and laborious task, especially when of necessity carried on with only the rude aid of flint or stone tools, involving as it must have done the exercise of indomitable patience, and entailing as it equally must have done constant risk of such dire failure as might ensue upon an ill-directed stroke, or the sudden disclosure of a latent fracture ; shattering to useless fragments the precious weapon when just on the eve of completion. Any locality, therefore, where kindly Nature supplied the desired form of flints ready fashioned either wholly or partially to the hand of the primitive hunter or rude builder, could not fail to be precious in the eyes of primeval savages ; it would gradually become a place of great importance, a place to be debated and fought over, and where marches or bounds would come to be set, especially where Nature herself had indicated a line of demarcation. Such a locality is Pen-pits, and all the essential conditions are there manifested !

Abundance of flint fragments—nature-formed implements—are still to be found at Pen-pits which might have served without further chipping for spear-heads or as skin-scrapers or hatchets ; but specimens are not wanting in the locality of ancient stones of a more deeply interesting character, because the imprint of the hand of primeval man is upon them—the rude tool-marks of the earliest stone-masons, and these stones have evidently been wrought from the green-sandstone slabs obtained at the pits. Several of these have been dug out from time to time by the local

quarry-men and as quickly removed by eager antiquaries ; they were found embedded in the *débris* "on edge" or slightly inclined (never lying flat-wise or horizontally) and were shaped ready for use : but from what cause left in the pits it is vain to conjecture. At a cottage in an adjacent village no less than three of these singular stones are to be seen built into the walls ; they are roughly circular in form, about two-and-a-half or three feet in diameter, and eight or nine inches thick, irregularly chipped ; they are supposed to be querns, and are probably in an incomplete state. One of these has a rough indentation, evidently chipped by a tool, at about the centre of its exposed face, which *may* have been cut by some mason when the stone was placed in its present position ; but if the mark be original (as it appears to be) it affords a curious instance of the early practical application of rudimentary geometry,—a centre, a stick (?) and the rude outline of the hewn stone !

It certainly would appear that the deeper excavations in the compound pits—one of which is even in its present condition twenty feet deep—were sunk to obtain, from the lowest strata reached by the miners, stone querns or slabs of this description ; but if the shallower pits are fully admitted to be flint-implement quarry-holes then a new difficulty arises, for it could scarcely be that the flint-implement-users and the more civilised quern-users or grain-grinders could be contemporary, and if not, there has to be explained the presence within the mouth of the deeper excavation of the shallow and round sub-excavations, these sub-excavations being identical with the flint-implement quarry-holes, and yet from their peculiar position neces-

sarily posterior in date to the deeper excavation or quern quarry-hole. It may be that the application of the edge-flint as a tool long survived its original use as a weapon, on which hypothesis all is made clear ; the large funnel-shaped or crater-like excavation would be the necessary commencement of a deep boring, after quern-stones, through loose soil by rude miners ignorant of the application of planking and shoring, or "timbering" as it is now called by miners ; the wide sloping sides being an unconscious application of that principle in earth work so well known to modern engineers as "the angle of repose," and in this case would be perforce adopted so long as the looser soil had to be penetrated. The slopes of friable earth would then be conveniently searched or pitted (by probably the women or children) for flint tools with which to dress the quern-stones ; but a sounder hypothesis is that the smaller sub-excavations at the mouth of the larger ones would be sleeping places or lairs for the miners guarding their treasure at night.

What a touching idea these speculations suggest of the helplessness of baby-men in those dawning twilight days ! How they yearned in their weakness and struggled for light and strength ! The poor fellows eagerly crowding to bore into this loose soil on the meagre chance of winning shapely flints or handy stones, and jealously guarding the rude holes where lay their paltry treasures, must have expended weeks of severe labour and days of keen anxiety about what would now demand but a light hour's work from any village mason ; while an adjoining district where are abundant solid beds of green-sandstone must have been to the feeble savage a *terra incognita*, or a place of torment

displaying to his tantalized gaze treasures his naked hands were unable to secure.

In matters such as this, the stock of positive knowledge possible to be 'acquired must necessarily be slender, while errant fancy may penetrate into deceitful and shadowy realms; yet cannot we refrain from curiously prying into the remote obscure as children peep into the dark!

On a general review of facts and inferences, a safe conclusion is that Pen-pits was partly a place of quarries for obtaining flint-implements and querns, and partly a place of abode or encampment used by successive generations of the primitive inhabitants of the surrounding country. It may also be safely conceded that the place would in the inevitable course of things be occasionally converted to hostile purposes by rival septs occupying the opposite slopes; nor does the assumption seem a violent one that on pressing occasion the entire area of the pits would be occupied by amalgamated tribes as a strong place of arms to bar the warlike advance of a powerful invader. But whatever the bias of our speculations may be, the intense interest attaching to this most curious relic of a remote age must be admitted. A clear and vivid eidolon, grouping and contrasting with this dim vision of ancient British life, is presented by the frequent gatherings of the North American Indian tribes at the "Red Pipe-Stone Quarry," as described by Catlin, for the purpose of obtaining the much coveted material for their tobacco-pipes, as necessary to them as the flint weapon to the ancient British hunter; thus, in our own era, proving how savage life repeats itself and

throwing an added charm and significance around this obscure nook of our Island.

Along the marches of which the site of Pen-pits forms a part, the successive footprints of the Celt, the Briton and the Roman may be plainly traced, while history and tradition record how Briton, Saxon and Dane fought and struggled for supremacy there; nor is there reason to doubt that the tide of such irregular warfare as in later centuries visited our Island beat and surged about the same lines. Several years ago an old Pen-pits quarryman brought me a curiosity which he had just exhumed in the course of his work from the bed of a pit; but I was greatly surprised when the old man, carefully untying a many-knotted dirty handkerchief, presented to my gaze instead of some curious relic of Brigante or Belgæ a rusty cannon ball! The matter was simply puzzling, and I laid by the small iron sphere without further thought; but some years afterwards, on obtaining from the same locality another similar specimen, the question certainly assumed larger proportions. Here then it appeared was evidence that upon the site of Pen-pits a skirmish must have been fought in comparatively recent times; yet there is apparently no record of such an event having taken place. The cannon balls are iron two-pounders, each about two-and-a-half inches in diameter, and such as would fit the light ordnance of the seventeenth century; they may have been fired by troopers of Waller or of Goring, or possibly have been expended in some obscure skirmish by James' soldiers in a vain attempt to retard the invading tramp of William's Dutchmen,—scarcely it can be surmised in any mad rally of fugitives from fatal Sedgemoor. At

any rate, if Pen-pits were a stronghold in the earliest ages of British history—a place of arms and the site of fierce conflicts between Welshman and Briton, Saxon and Dane, the cannon balls suggest one more proof how history repeats itself; the locality of even the slightest skirmish may be fixed in obedience to some pre-determined influence which exercises over agents and actors in the apparently free game of war a controlling power of which they are at the time unconscious.

Not only in war, moreover, but in the whole course of human existence the struggles and efforts of men are subject to the same predominant law—the multitudes follow age after age the worn foot-prints; and the mightiest efforts of mortal genius divert them but slightly. There is no convulsion however instantly swift and stunning but has been long in preparation by constant forces. Even the advent on the world's stage, with dramatic effect ever new, of the Man at the fated Hour is but a subtler evidence of the same prime law of evolution!

A remarkable custom survives in Dorsetshire and Wiltshire of holding fairs upon sites apparently the most incongruous—remote and desolate spots far from the busy haunts of men, but which yet are often marked by the remains of ancient works, or distinguished by some dim tradition of vanished importance, as if the dulled echo of the noise of once warlike camp, or of the loquacious tongues of once busy folk-mote still lingered around and claimed homage to the *genius loci*. The passing traveller is arrested, on turning some bend of the lonely road, by the unexpected apparition of a motley assemblage of

cattle-dealers, yeomen, drovers, gypsies, booths, shows, whirligigs and all the noisy concomitants of a country fair upon some quiet level of smooth turf, visited during all the rest of the year only by flocks of nibbling sheep and the shy-faced shepherd boy.

One such fair is held at Yarnbury Castle, a large earth-work adjoining the deserted road between Wiley and Amesbury—the huge vallum affording ample verge enough within its spacious enclosure for the accommodation of the whole of the busy crowd ; another, called “ Cold Berwick ” is kept on a bleak hill side, also in Wilts ; while one of the largest and most important sheep fairs held in Dorset takes place on Toller Down—an elevated spot remote from modern communications. There are also many fairs about various parts of the country preserving old associations of a later date,—such are those held, it may be, on an Easter Tuesday or a Trinity Monday, and which will generally be found in close connexion with some ecclesiastical foundation, now, like the fair which the wise Brotherhood established, lingering on in a state of placid decay.

A certain school of thinkers deem it impossible for the human imagination to conceive any mental image of which no actual material type has ever existed, and if this be true, then the Dragon-stories which have entranced such countless generations must be (as the story-books have it) *founded on fact* ;—truly a fascinating theory, and such an one as the captive mind finds it hard to wrestle with. Admit as true the thesis of pre-historic man's existence coeval with mammoth, ichthyosaurus and other possible



carnivorous monsters of whose being we have no present proof, the fact that the universal old-world myth of dire conflict between man and horrible beast arises from tradition of actual battle becomes an inevitable corollary; the mode of handing down to later ages the dim tradition without aid of writing or, scarcely, of speech being the greater wonder; compelling us to confess the existence in our nature of some mysterious ultra-phonetic power.

Grisly Behemoth madly routing the mounded settlements, opposed by a crowd of little flint-armed jabbering men, is a picture realizable by the light of recent African experiences; and the scene enacted upon our northern coasts, when a stranded whale is mobbed by fishermen, can be accepted as a pale reflex of awful conflicts that may have occurred when saurians huge and hideous were left floundering in the ooze of a primeval world; but while pen and pencil portray the modern instances, only the echo upon the tell-tale air of human cries of direst agony can have wafted to later ages the record of those earliest tragedies!

A respectable young butcher of A——, Sussex, once gravely told me that a Dragon flew over their town, and was effectually subdued and in due course slaughtered by the burgesses!—which marvellous statement, made in evident good faith, he capped by the assurance that a sculptured effigy commemorative of the wondrous beast was still to be seen in the churchyard! This was, indeed, a strange story, but—*materiam superabat opus*—the solid evidence, on being forthwith appealed to, turned out to be a dilapidated coped tomb-stone of some mediæval ec-

clesiastic, the stem of the embossed cross thereon doing duty as the dragon's backbone, its arms as his wings, and certain transverse marks, or rain-worn channels improved apparently by busy whittling of idle boys' knives, were not inaptly taken to represent the monster's ribs !

The first time I beheld Stonehenge was on a winter's night by moonlight—the great monoliths gleamed weird on the dark plain, yet, though a solitary traveller, I was not much impressed by them, but my horse confessed the genius of the place, shying fearfully at the huge stone overhanging the public road ; whether he saw more than the solid stone I cannot tell, but he trembled piteously, broke into a profuse sweat, and refused for a long time to go on !

The theories about Stonehenge are wonderful but conflicting ; for my part I have no opinion to offer, being content to accept without comment the unproveable ; though I do deny the statement that the stones are all exotic, and would undertake to obtain blocks identical in character and *size* with some of the monoliths within twenty miles of the place ; for which purpose I should explore the dark adit whence the monks drew the materials for the walls of Salisbury Cathedral.

“ The Druid's Head ” is the appropriate sign of a little inn on the Salisbury road about a mile from Stonehenge, and there I once met a wayfarer who had keen eyes and was very tall !

The gentleman, having divested himself of a broad-brimmed straw hat, introduced himself at once,—

"Guess you're no stranger in these parts?"

"I am, rather."

"Guessed so. I have come some miles further, native of Salisbury, state o' New York—drug store—put a man in for three months—drew on Li'pool for three thousand dollars—step'd across just to see the *old* Salisbury—and do Eu-rope some."

"Don't think much to these old rocks of yours," he continued, "the boy (his guide) sez there's no more of 'em, we've a many rocks in all parts o' the States much bigger." "Yes, sir, jes-so, not so much talked about, I dessay. But this yer old Island itself is *not* large. I've walked nearly all around it—it aint far. I landed at Li'pool, stepped on to Chester, through Wales, Cornwall, Devon, Exeter, then tuk the cars up tew London. London's a biggish place. I was there tew days! Then north in the cars to Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, on to Li'pool again. Then I visited the Lakes—walked around; them ar lakes air no use for navigation. Scotland, hilly in some parts; Edinbro', Glas-go, land o' Burns, land o' Scott, down by Newcastle, York, Hull, Lincoln, Norwich, Ipswich, London again, Canterbury, Dover, Brighton—smartish place that; Portsmouth, up to this old Salisbury. Glad I've seen *old* Salisbury, shall tell the young ladies when I get back tew the States what a tall steeple there is there, quite a novelty, and quite sharp at the point!" "Wall, yes-sir, shall probably see France, *and* Room. Now I'm out may as well walk around a bit, and I feel kinder satisfied it's all correct at the store. Room I'm told is an *old* place; we air not noted for old places in the States;

though in all else I think we lick this yer island, or any elderly country in cre-ation !”

Two characteristics of this tall gentleman with keen eyes struck me forcibly—his reverence for what was *old*, combined with his intenser energy in the direction of what was *new* ; and I could not refrain from hinting to him so much.

“Wall, yes-sir,” said he, “*it kinder anchors a man tew look back upon his ancestors !* We’ve no ancestors in the States, and so we come over here in search of ’em. It kinder sustains natur ! In the matter of GO I think we dew lick cre-ation,—we push around more than yew dew, and in our country a man finds out by friction what grit he’s made of !”

“Guess, sir,” he added gravely, “if the Anglo-Saxon race, sir, goes on extending, we shall want this little Island trimmed, and all the old institutions kept smart, for us to come and lounge about in !”

## CHAPTER III.

### THE MIGHTY ESTUARY.



IN the extreme northern parts of the county of Lincoln a kind of scenery prevails the very opposite of the Fen, which popular prejudice assigns as the distinguishing feature of that wealthy shire; it is not all "a pastoral in A flat," as wittily suggested by Hood's humorous sketch, for around the mighty Cathedral, standing erect upon a commanding eminence from whence it seems to dominate the fat Fen district, there spreads a stretch of broken heathy country not unpicturesque, while further north the swelling wolds owe their charm not less to their intrinsic beauty than to the old associations lingering round them.

The greatest natural feature which dominates North Lincolnshire is the mighty estuary Humber; his tawny flood receives the volumed waters of two large river systems draining one-half the Kingdom, his briny breath pervades the pastures for miles around, the sandy slime he disgorges from his maw raises islands from out the sea. That name, Humber! conjures up a host of recollections; what strange things we used to see when 'rambling on his banks or bathing in his shallows!

Once we came upon a corpse just left by the receding

tide among the ooze,—it was a woman's body, with long black hair tangled all round her breast and shoulders, the gulls had just pecked her forehead where it floated on the surge, but happily the eyes were closed, while myriads of shrimps emerging from the folds of her dress went hopping away to regain the water : this was all that remained of the fond wife of a brave fellow whose barque went down with all hands one wild night on the German Ocean.

Then there was that fearful and never-to-be-forgotten January gale, when the waves in the troubled estuary heaved and fell, huge black and oily, like hills of molten earth convulsed; each monstrous mass dimpled with innumerable quivering facets, but so oppressed and ground by the mighty pressure of the blast that neither foam nor spray relieved their smothered rage until they broke upon the shore ;—then a ghastly line of breakers smote the earth with a roar like thunder ; and gobs of spume and clouds of spindrift drove a mile in-shore. Hapless vessels—beyond the reach of human aid—reeled and staggered at their anchors, or breaking wildly from severed cables filled and went down, with crews brave in death waving farewell to the blanched faces on the dripping pier !

And that memorable pic-nic in the pleasant Park of T——y Hall on the Yorkshire side, when after a summer day spent in rambling over the sunny lawns and through the verdant woods, the tired family re-entered the welcome boat, and rested on her great wide cushioned seats to be rowed home again across the darkening river ; what horror when it was whispered round the careful boatmen had mended a gaping fissure in the bottom planking of the

boat with thick brown paper, and that it was now feared the frail patch was giving way; the shrieks of the ladies as a tiny water-spout shot up suddenly amidst their delicate sandalled feet,—then the silence enforced—the staunching of the leak with hastily stripped garments—the constant baling out of water that as constantly stole in—the grim expression on each countenance, characteristic of the stern humour of north-country folk. I listen again to the greedy lapping of the waves within a few inches of the gunwale of the boat, feel again the hissing tide scraping the frail sheathing close to my ear, and I crouch once more at my mother's knee content to cling to her and be silent like the rest, but hearing through the gloom the panting of the brawny rowers, and counting, spell-bound, every throb of their labouring oars!

The course we had to steer that night crossed "Hessle Whelps," a broad belt of troubled water shunned of river pilots and dreaded by small craft. Whatever the state of tide or weather, "Hessle Whelps" were never quiet; and though through countless centuries these sea hounds had leapt and floundered, the constant wonder of all who saw them, it was only yesterday, so to speak, that a clever local engineer detected their origin:—an immense volume of fresh water, collected in the chalk basin of the distant Yorkshire wolds, boiling up through the bed of the river.

No tidal water within the coasts of the three Kingdoms wears more the air of a triumphant invader than does broad Humber at the time of the in-rushing spring flood. How the old tawny River-horse must have curvetted and

exulted as the red-haired Vikings grasped his foamy mane, while his leaping whelps gambolled and barked welcome! There is a Scandinavian flavour in his briny atmosphere to this day—his breezes sing sagas and his swirling eddies mutter runes! The names of numerous North Lincolnshire places, such as Saxby, Ulceby, Bonby, Grimsby, prove how complete was the Danish invasion and settlement of this locality. Ulf, Biorn, and Grimm, what names of terror in Anglo-Saxon ears! I have talked with old people who remember the days before Waterloo, and it is strange to find how abject was the terror excited in the breasts of the non-combatant part of our population by the name of Napoleon. An aged west-country labourer tells me he remembers those times well. "I were a hard boy then, sir, an' all th' tāk were about Napoleon Bonaparty; t'were all put down where everybody was t' goo, but I know where we should all a-gone if they French had a-landed; why, as *they*'d a-come in at one end o' th' land *we* should all a-run out at th' other!" A doubtful tradition passing current among the 'long-shore men by the Humber, relates how Paul Jones, a late survival of the piratical Viking, sailed his saucy war-ships up the dangerous estuary without the aid of a pilot, and having deliberately felt his way up to the confluence of Trent and Ouse, wore ship, and disdaining to fire a shot at the garrison Town showed at last a clean pair of heels. A stranger survival of an era still more remote was shown when Van Amburgh, the lion-king, transported his menagerie across the river. A broad low-decked tow-boat was employed to ferry over a pair of elephants, but as it neared the southern shore it was suddenly relieved of its strange



burden, for the unwieldy beasts, prematurely liberated from their bonds either by accident or design, plunged into the water ; where, finding its muddy quality much to their taste, they disported themselves and then wallowed in the slimy ooze of the shore so boisterously, it was evident they were quite at home !—much to the discomfiture of the beast-tamer, who declared he would never again allow an elephant of his to see Humber water.

A narrow creek runs inland from the broad estuary, where I have often watched the in-rush of the “eagor” tidal wave, forming a living wall of foam some eighteen or twenty inches above the level of the effluent water which it overrode. This sudden influx of a vast body and weight of moving water used to cause a violent commotion among the various craft in the river, tossing them about like egg-shells and not unfrequently rocking them violently adrift from their moorings, insomuch that it impressed upon the mind of the beholder a painful sense as of some gross Triton riding on the spume, the spirit of cruel and irresponsible power personified.

Below the abruptly defined shore-line of the estuary spreads a wide expanse of warp, laid bare at ebb tide, consisting chiefly of slippery mud of the all-prevailing tawny hue, but with an occasional bed of sand of a peculiarly fine comminuted grain ; upon the dry hardened surface of which to venture afforded a fearful joy, while the dangerous experiment of causing the quick-sand to quiver until it became a semi-liquified mass possessed a fascination irresistible to adventurous lads. When “*alive*” the quick-sand is endowed with a diabolical power of sucking down and

holding tight its victim, and some nearly fatal cases have occurred of boys being held fast gripped and helpless, and rescued only by the courage and endurance of their comrades from a horrible living tomb!

The aspect of this district, partly wold, partly riparian flats, is characteristic of the best Lincolnshire country—a pleasant landscape, combining pastoral Dutch features with rougher and more picturesque outlines. A rivulet rippling its shallow pellucid current down from the wolds is called the “Beck,” while the artificial cuts, generally half full of still water, which intersect the broad flat pastures called “Ings,” are known as “Drains” or “Dykes”—“dyke,” as an engineering term, meaning *bank*, but the exact opposite in Lincolnshire vernacular. Where the Ings are not divided by drains the field boundaries are of quick-set, generally planted in straight lines, and allowed to grow until they form stout ox-fences or, in hunting phrase, “bull-finchers,” which in spring-time are laden with blossomed “May,” and in winter with crimson “Cat-haws.” A fanciful (?) resemblance may be traced between the sturdy Lincolnshire hind and his strong ox-fence on the one hand, and the cringing peasant of the West and his tangle of bending briars and weeds on the other; and one is tempted to carry the fancy further, and to wish for a modern improvement combining the strength of the one with the gentleness of the other. Stout earth-works, especially one distinguished as “The Humber Bank,” protect the low-lying Ings from incursion of rebellious tides; while numerous “sluices,” of various size and construction, serve to regulate the outfall of drainage and the influx of tidal water. On the lower levels where

now, reclaimed and made fruitful by the energies of man, fat grass-lands and rich corn-fields prevail, it is reasonable to infer there would be at the time of the Saxon colonization—when the old church was built high and dry on the wolds—only rough pastures submerged during the greater portion of the year, and reaped in haste by the first tenants of the Ings, or dreary fens the later state probably of primeval lagoons or narrow seas, for it is on the swelling wolds and broad uplands alone that any evidences remain of the Earlier Roman Conquest and occupation. Through all the centuries, therefore, from the days of the Saxon husbandman down to the present hour, the work of reclamation or of contest with the wasting forces of Nature has been carried on generation after generation by the rural population of this district ; the result of successful effort on the physical and mental characteristics of the race being as palpable as the effect of their labours on the land.

By habitual contact with such forces as have been and still are at work here the character of a vigorous race is moulded ; and there is no need to travel out of our own country for examples of Peasant Proprietors exhibiting such virtues and enjoying such comforts as should fall to the lot of all the toilers in our fields, for the county of Lincoln furnishes them. Between the brawny peasant of the Isle-of-Axholme and the starveling serf of the West the contrast is sufficiently apparent, and an obvious moral may thus be pointed by comparing the English labourer with himself (as it were) under different conditions.

When a severe winter brought floating ice up the estuary, grinding and whirling on the back of the flood until in the

upper reaches considerable fields of packed ice were formed, there would occasionally be observed on a distant floe a flock of Wild Geese or of Mighty Hooper, and then an exciting chase would ensue. A large boat would push off stealthily, manned by four stout long-shore men with muffled oars, and carrying one or two gunners armed with duck-guns cunningly concealed and fearfully loaded—each eager sportsman having some wonderful nostrum in the shape of notched or silvered bullet, marble, or greased patch rammed down hard on the top of a stiff charge. As the boat stands out from the jetty her course is steered at a considerable tangent from the unsuspecting quarry on the floe, and in such a way as to combine if possible the advantage of the tide with a line of approach up-wind, when a favourable position being gained oars are noiselessly unshipped, and the boat with its crouching crew is allowed to drift towards the birds; carried gently by the current, or aided only by the faintest propulsion of a single oar sculled softly in the stern “ro’lock:” each sportsman burning with suppressed excitement, and breathing uneasily his stern resolves into the cold bilgewater. Drifting along silently upon the ruffled tide, gliding easily between bobbing lumps of ice, grinding carelessly against obdurate floes, goes the fatal boat like a derelict at the mercy of the winds and waves;—preening their oily feathers innocently in the wan beams of the wintry sun—their broad red frost-bitten looking feet plunged into the pellicle of snow covering their temporary home, which idly rocks upon the tide swirling slowly to and fro with uncertain motion—stand the unsuspecting swans.

“So linger the swans and so on drifts the boat!”

And now steersman, unable longer to contain himself, strains one glaring eyeball above the gunwale of the boat, the crouching sportsmen "forrard," beginning to feel cold but not daring even to shiver, cast anxious glances up at his face expecting the signal:—suddenly it comes and unexpected as the long expected always does!—they see the man in the stern give a convulsive start—they hear at that fell moment a swish and swirl in the water as the swan's ice-floe heels wildly under the waves—they hear a loud flapping smiting cracking of strong pinions, as if a dozen yachts were wearing round close on them with a dozen flying jibs snapping in the breeze—they hear a confused rushing hurtling hissing, ending in a loud y-a-a-p y-a-a-p! h-o-o-p h-o-o-p! and starting madly to their feet they fire a volley; the boat heels and stops, then rocks dangerously, for she has struck the floe, and one gunner coming smartly down upon his knees has plunged his arm overboard into the freezing snow slush up to the shoulder; while another—he whose long and oft-tried tube had been rammed hard with a marble wrapped in a stiff patch of well-greased leather—is lying prone upon his back among the laughing rowers! As the gunner rests a moment in that inglorious position he sees, dropping from the sky, fluttering and whirling softly down into the water, a few feathers!—one—two—three, they fall and skim lightly upon the surface of the waves propelled in vagrant fashion by the idle breeze; but whether they were shot off or shaken off who shall say? As for the swans they have gotten themselves out of danger beating away on strong and steady pinion; while the disappointed sportsmen in the boat watch the fleeting forms of the great

birds as they gradually disappear into the fog-bank brooding on the face of the water a few miles distant.

Along the ridge of the great Humber-bank a pleasant footpath runs, with a stile at every meadow boundary, where lovers loiter or idle folks sniff at leisure the ozone-laden breeze. That a path or some kind of highway should be coincident with every canal and dyke in an artificially drained country is a matter of so obvious utility as to escape attention; but it points to a principle upon which older roads in other parts of the country may have been originally planned or gradually evolved. The outfalls, main drains, and sluices in a reclaimed district demand constant attention, and were no pathway formed alongside them such would gradually be worn by the passing of those entrusted with the duty of supervision; so upon the same principle, when in primitive times land first began to be claimed as the property of a sept or an individual, boundaries; which now by long usage have become not only well defined upon the face of the land but respect for which has become thoroughly engrafted upon the customary conscience of the people, would then be a new thing; to many an irksome innovation, and upon the free rights of roving tribes an encroachment, to be resisted by force of arms: thus, then, not only would the careful owner be constantly plodding round to examine his landmarks, but hostile clans would be constantly arrayed along the marches, pacing the line of demarcation between their domains and the claims of troublesome neighbours. A knowledge of the intrinsic agricultural qualities of land, which does not now obtain, and which must have been in a manner intuitive among the Anglo-Saxon

husbandmen, our ancestors, or which may have been the choice endowment of the wisest heads who controlled with paternal care the operations of those over whom they exercised authority, would also appear to have had much to do with the early setting out of boundaries ; and upon this principle the curious fact may be accounted for which has excited the wonder of close observers, that a narrow lane of only a few feet wide will oftentimes divide lands having distinct qualities,—that over the hedge on the one hand being bad, and that over the hedge on the other hand being good : this difference arising not from opposite modes of farming, but from intrinsic diversity of character and soil.

I know a lane in a rural parish in Dorset, called “Wych Lane,”—corrupted by the popular voice into “*Witch Lane*” from obvious causes, for the place is eerie enough and difficult enough—deep sunk between overshadowing banks—to be the fit haunt of such evil-disposed and meddlesome beings—which affords at once a happy illustration both of picturesque nomenclature and of really wise, though apparently arbitrary or foolish, adaptation to the somewhat strange outline of adjoining fields.

The name Wych is corrupted from Winch, the Anglo-Saxon root-word meaning to twist or turn abruptly (whence also our words “wind,” “winding,” though with a softened meaning), and “Witch,” “Winch” or “Wych,” Lane has some of the oddest angles ever seen in a road, and as plotted on a map exhibits an outline compounded of the handle or winch form (called in the west winc—c hard wink), and was evidently so planned originally to suit the outline of certain fields to which it afforded means of

access ; and though it has long been and perhaps was originally a thoroughfare, the honest Saxon ploughmen had no idea of driving ruthlessly from point to point ; they first laid out their farm according to their ideas of good husbandry, and then the road thither as a secondary consideration : hence this thing of wild beauty—the old shady lane—continuing as they originally planned it, loiters round the quaint corners and the well-arranged farm to this day. Thus the spirit of true utility wisely invoked consents to beauty ;—who knows but that the very blotches on the petals of this pansy, in the vase before me, I now look upon with pleasure derived from the gratification of the mere sensuous appreciation of colour, may have a use—in addition to the æsthetic use of beauty—and shall, when we are endowed with keener and deeper sympathies, so come some day to be understood of men !

In the north-west part of Dorset there are two typical examples of highways coincident with the county boundary—one is called “Land-shire Lane,” and at a point in the other there is a bridge called “Land-shire Bridge”—“shire” retaining its original Anglo-Saxon meaning of *shear*—division, as one should divide a web of “home-spun.” How characteristic of an Island Kingdom and a Seafaring people is the footpath that runs invariably along the head of the cliffs girting our shores—the path of the shepherd by day, and the lonely beat of the coast-guard by night,—how many an anxious eye has been turned from thence upon the troubled world of waters !

Right up the broad estuary—Humber—and into the confluent rivers—Ouse and Trent—sea-going brigs and schooners sail, while square-rigged ships and ocean-steamers



crowd the chief port on the Yorkshire side, with an occasional man-o'-war looming majestic in the eastern horizon ; but the most characteristic craft sailing up from the sea is the stout-hulled "Billy-boy," and, more rarely, her prototype the high-sterned Dutchman,—clumsy in build, but dogged in a storm. The icy Baltic still sends her motley fleet—green-painted Russians, Stockholm-tarred Swedes, rakish Danes, cabbage-bedecked Hollanders, and Germans with their high-booted, fur-capped crews, mindful of "Sour Krout"—as of yore she sent Ulf and Biörn and Grimm in their long war-ships seeking fresh fields and bright-eyed Anglian dames. The long keels of Ulf and Biörn and Grimm now sleep below embedded deep in the silt and slime of old Humber, never again to sail the glancing tide, or to be seen by eye of man, save only when some chance commotion in the river's bed spews up some black and ghastly log, scaring the long-shore men, and exciting the curiosity of all the antiquaries of the country side ; yet sweeping along upon the fresh morning tide there goes the big-sailed "sloop," and steadily following her the slow-paced, deeply-laden "Keel," craft of the ancient type now devoted to peaceful trading, but which might serve skipper Grimm, could he wake again, to tempt fortune once more withal upon the chopping seas of the German ocean.

Here in the Haven lies a shapely Keel—a "Canal Boat," discharging a cargo of bright wheat from the ripe furrows of the Midlands. The canal boat creeps along all the canals and runs all the river systems debouching into the Humber—haled by a labouring horse along the sluggish ducts, and sped by wind and tide down the breezy rivers, occasionally, when among the masterful currents of

the estuary, propelled by a mighty "sweep" at which two groaning boatmen work, pull and push, and guided by a peculiarly shaped broad rudder. To guide the broad rudder which guides the canal boat there is a tiller, elegantly fashioned and graceful in outline as the arched neck of a swan, at which not unfrequently there stands a comely dame, planted firmly on symmetrical limbs, the charms of their contour enhanced by the bright-dyed worsted stockings beloved of West-Riding folk. The comely dame, her husband the Keel-man, and a hired boy, constitute the crew of the Canal Boat—a tribe of grimy brats counting only as lumber; while supernumeraries, in the shape of a wiry cur who reared on-end all day long apes his betters by surveying the world across the gun'al, and a tame fox in a tub amid-ships, are endured—the one for the sake of secret service among the rabbits inland, the other on account of mirth-provoking antics that have relieved the monotony of many an uneventful voyage. The Keel-man has idle hours, during which, if the sun-beams shine warm, he dozes in a snug corner; or perhaps, armed with a stout rod and serviceable tackle, practises the gentle art upon silly roach and bream; but his chief recreation and purest solace he secures by practical devotion to fine art!

As the Kaffir notches the horns of his cow, and the New Zealander decorates the prow of his canoe, so the Keel-man, (in whose gentle bosom burns the same fire that has burnt ever in the hearts of all idle men since the far-off days of Athotes), adorns his craft; what time, as she rests idly on the Haven's quiet ebb, the lapping waters and the blazing sun combine to lace the golden-brown of her

resinous coat with evanescent arabesques of light, while gleaming opalescent films, washed from new-payd sheathing, go floating by, reflecting all the Tyrian dyes which since have adorned the fair. But the Keel-man, though an artist, draws no inspiration from the fantastic flickering or gleaming pencil of the sun—his designs are of a more formal and striking character. Armed with a few pots of the very brightest pigments—primitives blue red and yellow, positives black and white—a camel's-hair pencil or two, and, by way of mahl-stick, a light handspike, our burly artist brimming over with placid contentment picks out in oils his fearful and wonderful designs—geometric circles, stars, triangles, marigolds, or heraldic-looking checkers, every point whereof is correctly drawn, and—strange coincidence—dimly pointing to some common origin, the chromatic scale unconsciously employed bearing a close resemblance to those mediæval decorations on glass and panel to which some enthusiasts attach such mystic meaning. The favourite parts of the vessel selected for this style of ornamentation are those which on ship-board would be known as taffrail, binnacle, and companion-hatch, and especially each side the cut-water, where a circular design denotes the boat's eyes—Grimm provided such eyes for his sloop, and O-why-ee places them now on his war-proa!—these afford contemplative recreation in an eminent degree to our honest friend; but his daintiest fancies, lavished in minute touches on the facets of the tiller knob, are presumably designed for the gratification of that comely dame in bright-dyed stockings whose slender fingers so often grasp the tiller—queen of the keelman's heart and empress of his fortunes!

A canal is called by keel-men a "navigation ;" and the men whose work consisted in digging navigations were called "navigators" (meaning canal diggers, not sailors) and were the original navvies, the progenitors of those who made our railways.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BARLEY BELL.



**A**FTER a weary morning spent in the hard unfeeling City, bowing at a hundred shrines of Mammon but nowhere finding solace, how soothing it is to enter into the rest of this great Sanctuary! The harassed soul has suddenly found a cool harbour, and passed 'neath the encircling arms of the lofty Dome into the safe shelter of a loving bosom! There humbly resting, inspiring once more diviner music, she hears the near roar of mighty Babylon miraculously stilled, moaning like the dull noise of a distant sea.

It is very pleasant even in the country to find the old oak door yield as you press your hand upon the time-worn latch. The village life may not "wear" like "London," still there are moments even amid rural scenes when the heart yearns for rest, all the sweeter enjoyed at the opportune moment. No church nor any churchyard ever should be locked and bolted like a bank or a jail—there should ever be the open door;—nor should the attendant janitor be obtrusive, nor even the officiating priest. The memory returns of many a pleasant hour passed in some quiet church, when rest and peace but chiefly solitude were felt to be secure, and fancy free to conjure the willing spirits of

the past. How sensible almost to *touch* is the solemn hush and quiet of such a sacred place! The oak-carved angels on half-expanded wings people the mysterious depths of the fretted roof, while their silent fingers point to the knightly history on emblazoned shields, whispering through the dust of centuries the story of mortal and immortal!

But chiefly the memory of a day comes back like a faintly remembered dream, when we first explored—free from restraint of Sunday service—that old old church. How wonders grew upon us!—idle lads! There were the great sculptured masks, grotesque and grim, whose eyes of stone had seen the Ceorl goading his oxen at the plough, and whose pricked ears had drunk the wild music of the Rover's songs! These hitherto had frowned or leered at us from a distance, gazing their stony thoughts into our brains; now, with a kind of regretful joy, we discovered the very trick and fashion of them mounting the ladder of knowledge beneath the great round arches toothed and notched like sea-dragon's maw. Here was a mouldy corner, where the shining-pated sexton concealed an old oak bier,—what a gruesome discovery it was, with its scraps of sculptured stone and fragments of brown disinherited bones. There was the small vestry into the dim privacy of which we scarcely dared to venture, and being in felt uneasy in the presence of the parson's surplice, and at the aspect of the parish chest sternly barred and locked repelling our advances, while from behind a curtain a smug modern-featured looking-glass smirked a too familiar welcome. There also was the belfry,—region we had long wished to penetrate, to find (if perchance we might attain to it) by what subtle agency here came floating to our childish ears amid the apple

blossoms of the garden such golden Sabbath music. The old man, proud of his practised skill, told some of the secrets of change-ringing, and then fled our simple childish dreams; while a fresh curiosity climbed with alacrity the dangling bell-ropes, but shrunk with awe amid the shadowy company of bells—spirits asleep awaiting the whispered signal to spring into frantic life! But, chief ministers of dreams, there were the coats of ancient armour, each helm and corselet hanging mutely eloquent beneath its tattered banner, about which had flitted so many romantic visions; it was a rude awakening to find the breast-plates were real old iron, and the steel morions almost too small for our young heads. So old is this old church upon the wolds that around the nodding tower on winter nights, bearing rough greeting from the older home across the northern sea, for seven centuries the winds had raved before the Christian knights, by last bequest, hung up their battered armour within its holy walls.

Outside the rambling churchyard wall, laving its base, a pond lies spread, so large that seen through the deceptive haze of years it seems a lake, over which the saffron clouds of evening linger and flights of devilings whirl and scream, while the little bats go flickering past the white-railed bridge or flit into the soft oblivion of deepening shadows. Whilst we listen, out flies a peal of music from the rocking belfry—"the Barley Bell!" bawls a rustic flourishing his cracking whip, and after him steps the nodding team—coal-black, of the Lincolnshire breed—with jingling bells, drawing the tall load of yellow barley; upon which dancing throne sits a laughing rustic queen whom her brawny followers cheer lustily, while the sedate farmer jogs on

ahead, having claimed and won the prize for the first load of the season's barley. And this old place is *Bere-ton*, where ages ago the Anglo-Saxon thegn stored his spoils of harvest, and still to this day upon the same rolling uplands waves the bearded barley over many a fat acre. Upon the crown of those rolling uplands by the side of the great highway leading to an ancient cathedral city grows the Beacon tree, a stately thorn, from whose topmost boughs how often we lads surveyed the expanded scene. The toiling mariners guide their course along the mighty estuary by this living beacon now; but in olden time it served to direct the benighted wanderer across the wolds when there was little else to guide his way. The old tradition goes that a traveller, who had lost his way in the mists of night upon the bleak open wold, was guided to Bereton and to safety by the joyful clangour of the church bells at the time of barley harvest, and that in pious gratitude he endowed the church, assigning a yearly golden guerdon to the husbandman bringing in the first load of ripe barley of each recurring harvest for ever; and further that he caused to be planted on the swelling hill-top the Beacon tree: where a beacon tree has flourished ever since.

Along this broad highway—due north and south—at first a narrow track upon the higher ground scarce worn by naked feet, passing clear, in the earliest times, of horrid forest, and then, as the ages rolled, of reedy waste where once the forest grew—the naked Celt has roamed; the Briton, fierce as the wild boar of his sheltering woods; the Roman cohorts; the Saxon, choosing the fertile lands to settle on upon his route and rescuing bere in summer from the marshes; the



hurrying Dane ; the proud Norman baron, with his bosom friend the clerkly priest—all have travelled, following each the other's footsteps along the same road.

The knowledge of later days confirms the wisdom of the earlier, and scarcely has the stage-coach ceased to rattle upon the broad highway where the Celt once tramped, than yonder goes the iron railway, pursuing upon a parallel course the same natural route, and rushing past on wings of steam away flies the screaming locomotive. It is but as yesterday the fast stage coaches were whirling along in clouds of dust, the high-trotting horses, occasionally bursting into a smart gallop down the inclines, doing their constant ten miles an hour including stoppages. The Inn from whence the coaches started was a typical example of a kind of establishment then growing rare in most localities, and now utterly extinct throughout the kingdom. It was a large caravansera low-roofed and rambling, extending round three sides of an open court, which being paved with hard pebbles drew forth from clattering wheels and ringing hoofs a continual alarum, goading to seeming madness the scurrying tribe of serving-men and maids within. In the long rows of stalls in the large stables belonging to the establishment a hundred horses rattled their chains and stamped their tingling feet, all of that breed, matchless for bone and pace and bottom, the Yorkshire coach-horse. I once saw the operation of "docking" performed, a barbarous custom then dying out, and remember the horrid preparations with heel ropes and keen shears, and the piercing scream of the poor brute as the searing-iron was applied ! When the horses came in, steaming hot and bespattered with the soil of the road, a row would

be tied up to rings in the court-yard wall, eight or twelve at a time, while a posse of hissing ostlers would be scraping them, and dashing pail after pail of cold water over their shrinking loins. At night troops of horses, five or six being ridden in line, a tight-gaitered groom on each near leader, would be taken to a large horse-pond near the inn, and there ridden round and round, stepping high, to wash their legs, the sounding water lashed into foam by their trampling.

If Houyhnhnm could speak our language a little better, he would tell in the traditions of his race of the horses' joyous deliverance from the bondage of stage-coach travelling! But while our Cleveland Bays are delivered from a life of bondage, they are not relegated to a life of stupidity, but still find a nobler occupation as carriage horses;—we deal with our labouring fellow-creatures on a less intelligent principle. By the advent of machinery the labourers are relieved from some of the drudgery they underwent of old; but that drudgery although heavy had its compensations—there was the life-giving excitement of change, and the mental stimulus conferred by exercise of skill. We have yet to see our labouring classes afforded the means of occasional extrication from a dull monotony of labour, more deadening both to mind and body than severe toil.

"Steam" made its appearance in that locality both on rail and river nearly simultaneously. To those who never have had the opportunity of judging by contrast, it is almost impossible to realise the amazing celerity apparent in the movements of the early steam locomotives. The first

railways were constant sources of wonder, both during their construction and initial working, but if possible the first steamboats appeared to be still more marvellous. The ferry across the Humber used to be served by two sailing vessels—the Packet and the Horse-boat—both equally slow, if not equally elegant. When the wind and tide were propitious, the process of starting was tedious enough; but if either proved adverse, “way” had then to be got on to the Packet by a desperate expenditure of yawing, stamping, and cursing on the part of the captain and crew, with occasional severe exertion in which the more active of the passengers would join; so that when, as if dropped from the clouds, there suddenly appeared on the river a little waspish paddle-steamer, darting up to the pier, whisking round, and darting off again, with the sauciness of a ballet-dancer and the rapidity of a rocket, it appeared like magic and filled all hearts with amazement.

Old things in those days were incessantly going out and new things incessantly coming in, keeping the public eye distended in a chronic state of interested wonder, for so obviously practical was every discovery the most prosaic people could not fail to think they fully understood it. We appear at the present moment to be rising on a more spiritual wave of thought, gathering its strength in the mid-ocean of speculation beyond the sight of the busy crowd upon the shore; yet may not the more subtle force when it rolls onward and breaks be the more powerful? as the impact of a particle of dynamite transcends the ponderous blow of a steam-hammer! I remember the flint-and-steel box-of-tinder and brimstone-dips apparatus for obtaining light lingering by the side of the new lucifer

matches, a shilling a box, with a piece of folded sandpaper wherewith to ignite them—which, in turn, had just superseded some doubtful new preparation of phosphorus.

While His Majesty's mail was still running, with fleet horses scarlet-coated guard blunderbuss and horn, there appeared a rival "concern" upon the road, bowling along smoothly enough, impelled by steam of course, as in those days by what other agent should it be! yet in the very similitude of a stage-coach, wanting only the horses. *That* was an invention which missed its mark—the lieges sat uncomfortably upon it I believe—and so it dropped back into the limbo of things forgotten; yet had a little less haste been shown in the eager race of invention, is it not just possible the world might never have known railways, and have been content to travel by steam on common roads; or, rather, would a mixed system have prevailed, and express trains only have rushed along grand trunk Lines?

The ancient and vagabond Mountebanks came to the town, although there was a newly established Theatre Royal in a back street, where Thalia and Melpomene were fain for the nonce to preside over the Thespian mysteries in a so-called Barn, content if they were only spared that last degradation "performing" in the open air. But the Mountebanks delighted in perfect freedom, and scorned the restraint of any roof, save only the vagrant-clouded sky of a summer afternoon. Where they went all the winter who knows?—or cares! Their advent was proclaimed by "Mister Merriman" parading the streets in motley on a pie-bald horse, who with blast of bugle

and tirade of puff would request the attendance of the lieges that afternoon in a certain grass-field—the exclusive use of which had been secured at immense cost for that day only—there to behold the wonderful equestrian performances of the unrivalled Troupe of the Great Master Bernardo, who was greater than Ducrow, further informing them a variety of useful articles, made expressly for the Great Master by friendly manufacturers at a loss, would be disposed of by lottery, at the close of the performances, thereby more than reimbursing the price of admission to all those who should have the great good fortune to attend.

As for the Theatre Royal, it got fusty from being so often closed, preserving however a dull retired air of outside respectability ; although a whispered rumour was current that the stately appearance of the front was belied by the aspect of the back, where some show of business was evident to prying eyes in actual storage of hay and straw. But at rare intervals the respectable façade smiled and blossomed into life with a gay display of play-bills. His Majesty's servants it was announced, in the person of Mr. and Mrs. Smedley and family of the York circuit, had arrived, and purposed to elucidate by display of highest histrionic art the deepest tragedies of Shakespere and the brightest comedies of Goldsmith. Mr. Smedley was a portly individual, who might have passed for a merchant of full habit in reduced circumstances but for a trick of measuring his paces when he advanced to solicit patronage, which betrayed the sock and buskin. He was invariably accompanied—dogged might it be said as by a shadow—by a silent reserved gentleman whose aspect was

unmistakably stagey. This mild Horatio,—for by that name his intimates would address him, slapping him on the back meanwhile irreverently,—was the leading tragedian of the little company, devoted wholly to Art, and never known to speak off the boards in public; he had a manner, while his partner was engaged in animated colloquy with a wealthy patron, of standing a little apart in in-kneed majesty—the general effect, however, marred perhaps by work-a-day clothes, being pathetic rather than terrible—yet as he kissed the tips of his rusty gloves on retiring there would seem to hover round his pensive brow a something not majestic, an uneasy suspicion as if possibly he thought he had not sufficiently mastered the financial details while seeming absorbed overmuch, and that therefore the gushing Smedley might be too many for him at the final settlement of those pestilent money matters!

“George Barnwell” was a stock-piece with this respectable company; and I remember, some family prejudices having first been overcome by the touching eloquence of Mr. Smedley, two very young gentlemen wearing stiff collars and tight cravats being despatched to the dimly lighted Theatre, and left sitting in solitary state in the boxes on a benefit night, when that highly moral play was performed by special request. The chief recollections now remaining of that night are a vivid impression of the gloomy frown of the mild Horatio as “George Barnwell,” with a less vivid one of the dressing gown of the benevolent “Uncle,” which was of grey serge depending in feeble folds from stooping shoulders, a constrained attitude faithfully preserved throughout the entire per-

formance, concealing with nicest art the fact that the aged Uncle was played by a youthful super, the regular utility man having been unavoidably absent on business connected with "some property." I remember, too, a motherly greeting, bursting through the ice of reserve, from poor Mrs. Smedley : who sat in a tall box near the entrance, genteelly dressed, to receive the tickets, with a melancholy smile upon her faded face, as if she had made acquaintance with dull care behind the painted scenes.

A cricket match was a rare occurrence then in the north of England, but one took place in a level field adjoining the great Coaching Inn, at which all the players on each side arrayed in flannel jackets and tall hats, wore, as a distinguishing badge, stagey-looking coloured sashes tied with a huge bow at the waist and with fringed ends dangling to the knee.

A class of itinerants common enough then, but never seen now, were the Buy-a-broom Girls dressed in short blue petticoats and high white caps, continually soliciting "the lady" of the house "to buy of the wandering Bavarian a broom." A wandering showman not at all uncommon was a weather-beaten sailor-looking man who, throwing open the folding front of a mysterious looking box, on receipt of a penny, disclosed a mermaid. Real toilers-of-the-deep occasionally perambulated the streets with a genuine monster placed on a hand-barrow—a big Sea angler or a small Sea wolf.

Sooty death no doubt has long since "*called*" for "Tom Sweep," as the ramoneur with his sweeping machine has called for all his tribe. "Tom" was a big hulking fellow,

the reputed possessor of wealth, and the master of some half-dozen journeymen and a tribe of those poor little Climbing-boys whose business it was to thrust the brush out at the top of the chimney-pot, "calling" to big Tom watching below, in satisfactory proof they had gone through their doleful job effectually.

I saw a prize-fight once—truant from school to snatch the fearful joy—in which one of the combatants was a swarthy gypsy, backed by all the amazons of his tribe ; who set up a strident crooning whenever their champion received a severe blow, but who at last bore him off in triumph, singing a wild pæan which might have been heard a mile away among their fluttering tents down the lonely Ings lane. The way the gypsy won the fight, he being much the shorter man, was by "stepping in," (to use the *argot* of the ring) and taking on his hard skull, as on a shield, whatever the taller man could give him, then delivering a terrible half-arm "draw" with his "right" under his antagonist's fifth rib ! In this his whole offensive tactics consisted, and his defensive in "getting to grass," cleverly, the instant he had succeeded in "landing." By the time the broad-shouldered gypsy rogue had thus knocked nine times—knocking three times thrice at the door of life—the tall man literally hauled down his flag, for he sank in a heap surmounted by the coloured kerchief he wore round his brows, and rose no more !

These gypsies were gypsies of the pure blood, not mongrel half-gypsy half-vagabond folk such as compose three-fourths of a vagrant encampment at the present day ; and all through the summer months they were wont to lie in some large disused grass-grown gravel-pits : going, like



the mountebanks, elsewhere in winter. If to the rendezvous in the sheltered Forest-land they went, or to the great Royal Town, many a weary mile through the sloppy leaf-strewn lanes they must have tramped from Bere-ton. These were Coopers, if I remember rightly, and they had with them generally a stout middle-aged couple whom they styled "king" and "queen." Afterwards in East Anglia I met with gypsies of the tribe of Lea ; three girls of the clan being noted beauties, with liquid black eyes and tall supple figures, who danced at fairs in a refined style the effect of which amid such surroundings was startling, and who might have fitly graced the most elegant operatic stage. They were played to by three brothers, swarthy Rizzios, whose fingers were as nimble on the violin as their sisters' pretty feet were on the floor ; but whose scowling eyes flashed terror to the heart of many a rash intruding wooer ! The women of the Cooper family were of a commonplace type ; but two of their young men were of surpassing strength and agility. I remember being taken by a friend to a level mead near the "Blo Wells"—a weird and woody spot much haunted by the Egyptians in search of savoury meats for the flesh-pots—to see a quiet match between two youths of our acquaintance and the two young gypsies. The two young gentlemen stood under the shade of the feathery ash-trees awaiting our arrival, fair-haired and ruddy, clean-limbed proper and tall, either of them over six feet in his stockings, and both the very type and flower of English lads ; the two gypsies came later, and, as if to prove their perfect trust, unaccompanied by even a child of their tribe. They were not so tall as our fair-haired friends by some three inches, raven-haired, and apparently of

slighter build ; but in reality they were better trained, sinewy and tough as the covering of Achilles' shield. They first put up their hands in a playful manner and essayed a few feints and guards, in which at once it was evident the English youths were over-matched—the dark fellows had not been disciples of Mendoza for nothing ! Then sundry feats of strength and agility were tried—wrestling, the dead lift from the loins, springing from a mark, vaulting across water, and finally the flying leap over quick-set hedge and ditch : in all of which the Saxons held their own against the Saracens. But, at last, a contest was proposed in a mode of leaping—"hop skip and jump"—at which our friends were adepts ; they set the gypsies tasks—further, further, faster, skimming over the grass until they attained their maximum momentum, and covered almost their longest recorded distance. Then, as if they had now sufficiently learnt the secret of it, the two swart athletes rushed to the mark for the final contest, and bounded off at such a pace the wind whistled as they cut through it ; they hopped and flew forward as a ball of india-rubber or a shot from a howitzer might hop and fly, and so they continued with elastic bounds without a pause until they were lost to our sight in the leafy screen surrounding the Blo Wells ! After the lapse of a few minutes they emerged, came forward coolly, collected their garments, and so departed towards their tents in silence, with a quiet smile upon their faces !

The foregoing are faithful sketches from nature, the colouring in nowise heightened ; but yet it must be acknowledged the originals were quite exceptional ; the ordinary run of gypsies are commonplace enough. On one occasion a band of juveniles, foraging about as lads will,

had fished up, on the spike of a leaping pole, a large flounder in a putrid state, which an old gypsy crone at that moment coming by, begged and bore off to the cooking fire. On another occasion, by some kind of invitation I believe, a crowd of the towns-people assembled at the Gravel-pits to see the gypsy people take tea in state—it was on one of the occasions when the king and queen were present, and all the pieces of the service not of fine china were pure silver. With these people horse-dealing was a staple trade, and they had always with them at their encampment (in addition to the usual motley collection of donkeys, mules, and lean-ribbed screws) a brood mare or two with foals running by their side in the season, the mares thoroughbred, in plump condition, and showing the unmistakable soft-outlined contour of the pure Arab. The farmers in the immediate locality—one especially, whose homestead was not more than half-a-mile away from the Gravel-pits—paid black mail to the rovers,—daily dole of skim milk, occasional messes of curds, bits of bacon—what not?—and upon those terms got on very well, and no complaints were heard: many a hare was pulled down by the lurchers from the tents, and many a rabbit netted by their masters, and, though rarely, a lamb even or some fowls might be missing; but no murmurs arose, for the dark-eyed rogues kept all others off: yet in later years the tawny ones got to be harried by the constables.

The art of Fortune-telling is practised by almost all the gypsy women; but I believe there used to be, and perhaps there still may be, some of the race who were the true fortune-tellers, endowed with the peculiar art of divination; though it is nothing more than people other than gipsy are occa-

sionally gifted with : it is that intuitive recognition of character at first sight which rises not unfrequently to the loftier sphere of prophecy, and is essentially allied to that other power of compelling men, which the gifted ones exercise sometimes at will sometimes unconsciously. In olden times and among primitive communities, he who possessed the one gift was a Seer, and he who displayed both became a King. On one occasion in a southern county I heard a gypsy woman pronounce, and that instantly in terse terms and with a kindly smile upon her dark face, the character of a gentleman whom she saw for the first time : she singled him out from among the crowd on the impulse of the moment, no allusion even the slightest having been made to fortune-telling, and gave him the gratuitous certificate in words most quaint and apposite ;—there was apparently some bond of sympathy between them—certain it is that truer words were never spoken !

The “ Blo Wells ” are peculiar crater-like holes, very deep, and standing full to the brim with clear icy-cold blue-tinted water ; and may probably be caused by subterranean action on the one side of the Great Estuary similar to that which produces the Hessle Whelps upon the other. Forcing your way through the tangled arbour surrounding them, you come upon these strange still-surfaced waters, and gazing into their aerial-looking depths, there far below may be seen the limpid fluid welling up, in which the little white particles of sand are for ever dancing, while shadowy carp go sailing idly round and round. The place is a silent stronghold of lingering superstition, eerie to be alone in even by daylight, for the “ headless woman ” walks at all hours ; the “ four-legged fish ” which came out of the

water and pursued some solitary intruder would doubtless be a rambling otter. The gypsies, hard by, were wont to have at least *this* part of their domain all to themselves after nightfall.

The ways of men upon the world of waters follow customary lines as they are wont to do upon land—they have their paths upon the sea ; and did but the keel leave its furrow across the waves, what an old and well-worn highway there would be, for instance, between France and our southern coast, or between Holland and our eastern shores, or again between Scandinavia and Northumbria. That bond of union, woven strong when Iceland, as the seat of an ancient civilization sent its hardy pioneers south to our coasts and north to the icy realms of Greenland, continued to connect our Great Estuary with the northern whale fishery until the discovery of gas put out the light of the old train-oil lamp. In frowsy yards, by the shore of swaling Hull, the mouldering remains of ancient whaling glories may yet be discovered—blackened timbers, still stout and strong, that have withstood the roaring crush of ice, and rusty anchors that have held on grimly to toppling floes, while the resolute mariners—the bones of *some* of whom now moulder in the adjoining churchyard—fought amid arctic darkness against whales and bears. The scapula of a whale may be seen occasionally in some neighbouring village hung up in irons as an ale-house sign, while whales' jaw-bones are not infrequent as tall posts to the gateways of fields in the vicinity of Bere-ton : as if the peaceful agricultural descendants of the Jutelanders inherited a lingering fondness for the northern seas, and felt some latent touch of the old passion for hunting the great monsters of the deep.

Steam some years since was introduced as the motive power for Greenland whalers ; but the ancient glories of the fishery are departed never to be restored. Still, some old people may perhaps linger who remember when the setting forth of the whaling fleet and its return—oftentimes sadly diminished in numbers, for it was a perilous trade!—were the two great events of the year, and when a successful “fishing” caused high revelry to be held in the port and in all the country round for weeks. But though the route to the remotest realms of ice and darkness is now seldom taken, the commerce with the Baltic along the old beaten track still flourishes in greater vigour than ever, and still may be heard amid the clank of great chains and the rattle of tarry cordage, this favourite old refrain, as the brawny sailors step round the groaning capstan—

“Sally’s going to Petersburg—  
Sing, Sally, ho ! ”

while their sweethearts on shore, painfully cognizant of the *realities* of maritime adventure, croon a simple ditty full of the mournful music of the sea—

“The shells of the ocean shall be my love’s bed,  
And the *shrimps* of the sea shall swim over his head ! ”

## CHAPTER V.

### HOMELY SCENES.



CHEAP mode of enjoying many of the benefits of foreign travel is to view the homely scenes around us under all the varying aspects imparted to them by time and weather. There are thousands of good methodical folk, wearing out their quiet lives in some fair nook of country, who never view their own familiar landscape save under one monotonous round of common-place aspects ; to them the moon-lit watches of the night, the earliest gleams of dawn, the wild blasts of elemental war braved under the open sky, are all unknown. But he who views fair nature aright foregoes some comfortable conventionalities, and woos her in all her moods, through every varying season and during all the hours of day and night. Some scenes thus viewed live afterwards in the memory, and so, gradually, may be furnished with choice pictures a mental gallery—a secret cabinet of purest pleasures, through whose mysterious portal no jarring foot of stranger can intrude.

One picture thus treasured is an early morning landscape on the breezy Foxhills by the banks of silver Trent. The joy felt only by lads released from school wells up in my heart—a strange bed-room, earnest

of fresh pleasures to come, a quaint stone-mullioned window curtained with white dimity smelling of lavender, greet the awakening sight ;—what gladness to bound out of bed and push open the rattling casement, with its deftly hammered latch and floral scroll, haply the masterpiece of some chirping smith whose once merrily tinkling hammer, wont at sunrise to rouse the village street, has been hushed for two hundred years ; there are the silent lawns all grey with dew, as yet untracked by clouted shoon of earliest hind, while floating through the mist comes the *clangour of distant geese* skimming away on quivering wings to an early plunge in the pond.

The rudest rural noises are made charming by associations : the wheelwright's drowsy saw, the bird-boy's clapper in the wheat heard from beneath the shade of whispering elms, the loquacious jaking of daws about the airy battlements of some ruined keep, the creaking of the harvest wain, the hollow baying of a distant watch-dog at dead of night. The various sounds of bells are always pleasing : the merry jingle of an old-fashioned farm-team ; the noise of cattle-bells in Epping Forest like the clear ring of a mason's trowel edge-cutting hard bricks ; the restless sheep-bells on the Wiltshire downs, "kolottle, kolottle," sounding like the Russian name for bell, "kolo-kol ;" the sudden tinkle-tinkle-tinkle of a flight of bicycles. The postman's horn, and the mellow bugle of the scarlet-coated mail-guard are heard no more ; nor can the warning shriek of the railway whistle be accepted as sufficient compensation for the loss of them, in a musical sense.

I remember a very early start by the Boston mail-coach from an old-fashioned inn at Peterborough ; it was before



daylight, and I was dragged out of window by a bawling post-boy. The coachman, a powerful red-faced man, drank a pint of cold water before starting and spoke never a word as we trotted on steadily through the raw morning air. The larks kept fluttering up here and there from dreary fields along our route uttering a few notes of music, then fluttering down again, and it was not until the sun shone warmly on a church spire of gleaming stone near which we changed horses that any lark rose high in the sky.

A storm of wind in a forest has an appalling effect. I once rode several miles to a remote hamlet on a visit to a substantial yeoman of venerable age. The old gentleman, diverted by my juvenile speculations, pressed his mellow port, which gleamed tawny in the circle of light shed from two blinking candles in silver candlesticks of Queen Anne's day, and it was black midnight outside the hall door when I mounted my horse to depart. The horse, a half-broken colt of Irish breed, was iron grey and sixteen-two, with no mouth, but of great speed and bottom—which I was quickly to test. Once clear of the hamlet, I had a dreary stretch of utter solitude to face along a dim road skirting a wood. Here was felt the full fury of the blast, which before had buffeted my face with an occasional angry spit of rain. The moon, never clearly visible, shot now and then a gleam of watery light upon the trees, which writhed and whirled in frightful contortions. No wonder that forests have ever been the home of shapes unearthly and sounds inhuman! The noise at such a time oppresses the quailing heart; while, rousing keener terrors, high above the deafening roar

occasioned by the steady grinding of the wind through leaves and branches, there comes at intervals a violent gust of dolorous wailing as of unhappy ghosts being driven to their doom ; or, anon, a sudden shriek so piercing the smitten trees seem endowed with an agonised personality ! Incontinently the gallant grey was put to his utmost speed, a mutual terror possessing horse and rider—which the sudden apparition of a rotten trunk emitting spectral gleams, or the pallid branches of some giant of the wood tossing in superlative agony, only served to increase—and no curb was tightened, no bounding muscle relaxed until the distant stable was reached :—at that dead hour groom and stable lad were snoring, and a copious feed and hasty toilet did not save the reeking beast from becoming “hide-bound” :—the promising Irish colt was ruined for that season !

Wandering about A——l Park during a thunderstorm at night, the occasional flashes of lightning revealed the deer standing in silent groups beneath the raving trees, their heads all turned one way, at gaze and motionless.

Once while under canvas near the coast a hurricane shook all the tents, prostrating some, and working dire confusion in the suddenly awakened camp. Stealing away from the hubbub I clambered safely down the cliffs in the darkness, and sought shelter from the rain and spindrift in a tiny hut built of wreckage, and devoted during morning hours to the boiling of lobsters ; from whence, by the occasional gleam of the moon through driving storm-clouds, I saw a man, apparently possessed by some wild hallucination—a mad orator—stalking up and down upon the sands and gesticulating at the white-topped breakers, whose force

however he carefully calculated, shifting his position with great agility, so that each spent wave only just wetted his feet; but irate Neptune was not to be so bearded with impunity—the madman stayed too long to rave at a long retreating undertow, there was a sudden upheaval of the tide, a staggering wall of waters, a wild commotion, and then a sudden rush and roar of spray, in which the wretch was submerged to the armpits, thrown down and cruelly buffeted: from which prostrate condition emerging presently he ran away, ceasing not until lost to sight in the darkness.

Night scenes, however, are only occasionally hideous or terrible; there is a silent darkness, a profundity of gloom, solemnly impressive, and a clear starlight accompanied by brisk wind which is positively exhilarating, while no poetry is so universal as that which the moonlight breeds; but there is a *warm*, almost golden, moonlight of rare beauty, not often sung by poets, that may occasionally be seen in still damp autumn weather, when the moon herself being hidden, there steals through fleecy spaces in the dull field of coppery clouds a tawny haze, gleaming with ravishing effect upon some ancient homestead drowsing in the billowy bosom of misty woods, and transfiguring the common roofs and gables and homely stacks into a fair scene of oriental romance.

The red moon is of course a familiar object, and a stock subject for the poets, the apparent red colour and immense size of the planet being due to the misty medium through which she is seen: the virgin Queen of Night seeming lurid when obscured by earth-born fogs, but shining pure and clear with her own sweet silver light

when she has gained the crystal empyrean ! It is a poetic hour when the blood-red moon, "round as my shield," rides above the dim eastern horizon in the purple gloaming ; but there is one still more poetical—because less hackneyed—when, shorn at one ragged margin of some portion of her disc, the other glowing fire, she hangs upon the dusky shoulder of some western hill, at that most silent time when all the earth is wrapped in deepest sleep, long after the old Cathedral clock has boomed midnight, but ere yet the dawn awakes !

A rural sound, which, like the music of the mail-guards' horn, has been smitten dumb by the advancing resonance of science, to be heard no more, is the tap of the thrasher's flail ; when three or four flails were swinging in concert the sound was rhythmical and not displeasing, the dull sound as the blows fell upon the full sheaves alternating with occasional sharp raps upon the oak barn-floor. There was a method in this, as in the ringing of a peal of church bells, or the forging of iron at the village smithy ; in the latter case, when a welding heat is secured, the master smith, armed with the tongs and the small hand-hammer, leads off the concert with two merry taps upon the anvil, then he smites the glowing metal just where he wishes a heavier blow to be struck, which instantly follows as his brawny assistant, who has held the sledge poised aloft, brings it down with a "Ugh !" upon the exact spot ; a single tap on the anvil tells when the master has had enough of brute force, and he then proceeds to put the finishing touches to the job with the small hammer alone. The musical effect of forging is increased when three hammers are going, the hand-hammer, the sledge, and the

heavy sledge. Another sound embalmed in poetry, the whetting of the mower's scythe, has given place to the queer strident chatter of the mowing machine.

The want of such exercises of manual skill is a distinct loss to the *morale* of the agricultural community ; where once the sturdy lad took his place upon the polished floor, and gained some healthy mental excitement in the process of learning to swing his flail so as not to break his own or his partner's head and to rain down his blows correct in time and place, he now stands "dunchy" round the humming thrashing machine.

The earliest sound of rural labour heard in a Norfolk village of a summer's morning used to be first—and that would be about five o'clock—the rapid ringing of the smith's hammer beating a small bar of special tempered metal—shoe-nail iron—to bring it to a red-heat wherewith to kindle his forge ; then the sawing, planing, shaving, at the wheeler's shop ; anon, the monotonous thumping of the labouring flails.

The pattern of flails differed in different localities ; in East Anglia the handle was longer than the swingel, and they were connected by loops of wood bound with thongs of wit-leather, or (if memory serves), when obtainable, eel-skin : a sovran ligature for a tough job. In Essex the labourers used flails with handle and swingel of equal length, and their swing was less downright and more artful than that of the Suffolk peasant. I never shall forget a journey through the Rodings, that clay wilderness, when the wretched hinds were receiving but seven shillings per week wages, nor dissociate their feeble style of thrash-

ing from their wan looks. I recollect a group of them standing in a barn munching hunks of dry bread for dinner, with an occasional onion or apple by way of condiment.

Both keepers and poachers in the ancient deer forest of Cranborne Chase used to carry a small pocket-flail or swingel, specimens of which are still preserved ; the handle of wood is stout, not much over a foot in length, and suspended to it by a short strong chain is a solid ball of iron. This weapon is evidently a rude copy of the swinging mace used by the Scandinavian invaders of Britain, and also the imperfect model of the modern life-preserver ; it must have been awkward to use, and the natural defence against it, a cumbrous helmet or "bee-pot" of padded wicker-work, equally awkward to carry. All primitive hand-weapons were designed to strike at the head, a peculiarity probably owing to the universal custom of carrying some kind of shield as a protection to a part of the body more vulnerable than the skull, and in the pugilistic encounters of the modern prize-ring, where no weapons but those provided by nature were allowed, the ancient function of the shield was still discharged by the code of honour which decreed loss of wager to him who struck "below the belt ;" but where outlaws are concerned it may be of service to remember this unguarded and unguardable point : during that winter when garroters were the terror of suburban London, a solitary gentleman, who luckily knew the trick, discomfited three ruffians by using his umbrella as a *bayonet* ! The cowards were as much non-plussed as the poor Highlanders at Culloden.

A scene, most pleasant to recall, used to be enjoyed

at early morning by the margin of the Swanbourne Lake. A quiet woodland path facing the east, and screened by a canopy of translucent foliage through which the blazing sunshine filtered, passed close to the edge of the lake, enabling one to observe, without causing alarm, the busy creatures in the water—so crystal clear that every delicate frond of glittering weed at the bottom was distinctly visible, and there a little Dabchick—quaintest of water-fowl—used to disport himself, unconsciously affording infinite amusement. This bird dives so noiselessly, moves so rapidly under water, and so buoyantly pops up to the surface again, that he seems a bird-ghost uncontrolled by the laws of matter. The Dabchick (*Colymbus Hebridicus*) is usually a shy bird, but one day a pair were seen where such birds had never been seen before, in a small mill-pond bordered by a much frequented public highway; and their sudden appearance was doubtless due to the fact, that the newly-formed park of Lord W., with the recent addition of a large piece of ornamental water, was close by. It is remarkable how soon wild creatures become aware of new localities suitable for their occupation. In what "Times" or "Field" do they read the advertisements of eligible properties to be let? Water-hens (*Gallinula chloropus*) are frequently met with in a state of semi-domestication, they occupy ornamental ponds in parks and old weed-grown moats near country-houses frequently in considerable numbers, from whence, if properly accustomed to it and treated with gentleness, they will troop like domestic fowls on to the lawn to be fed. A little pond or water-hole not more than four yards across near some cottages and a public road on S——y Common, Wilts, has been regularly frequented by a pair of water-hens for years.

The wide expanse of level landscape forming the great Vale of Blakmore in the West of England, when viewed from the summit of any of the surrounding hills or table-lands, occasionally presents strange aspects under the transforming influence of fog. At early morning in summer time it is pleasant to watch the vast sheet of dense white vapour begin to move and lift, as if suddenly awakened by some potent spell; to see it unfold here and there, revealing glimpses of sunlit fields or distant spires, and at last clear off, cloud rolling after cloud accompanied by flying shreds and scattered wracks of evaporating mist, until the whole wide landscape lies a vivid panorama at your feet. During long-continued hot dry weather about the time of the summer solstice, the fog will lie upon the vale from daybreak until four or five o'clock in the morning, presenting the perfect semblance of a fleecy sea, with tips of wooded hills showing here and there as islands, and the clear blue vault arching high above unruffled by any breeze, while a scattered hamlet, with its tawny roofs painted vividly upon the background of clear blue, is transformed into some fishing village of Thessaly, sleeping on the mimic shore of a white *Ægæan*! In winter the fog is grayer coloured, and does not disappear with the morning, but sometimes in still weather remains all day, and should the air be frosty and the feathery sprays of the woodland trees be coated with rime, another and altogether different transformation effect is presented, a fairy landscape traced in every imaginable shade of pearly gray and snowy white upon a sad coloured sky, forming a scene of exquisite beauty. That the position of a cloud in the sky—a thing apparently so erratic—



should be constant and obedient to some fixed law may appear strange, yet it is nevertheless true. Over the vale of Blakmore may be observed the frequent appearance of a long level bar of cumulo-stratus cloud about ten degrees above the horizon, and occupying an arc of some ninety to one hundred and twenty degrees, extending horizontally from about south to north-west, but varying considerably in its own actual length and continuity. May the appearance of this cloud be due to some exhalation from the channel or from the river system crossing the country in that direction? In the same locality occasionally a singular sunset effect is observed, a rosy flush in the north-western part of the sky remaining after sunset, and even after the disappearance of the after-glow; frequently this ruddy hue of sunset is seen quite round to the northern quarter of the sky, when in the west the light of sunset has departed, and night begun to spread her shadowy mantle.

Artists usually paint their clear English skies too blue—our skies are rarely blue except when white clouds give the effect of contrast. When we are blessed with that rare treat, in our climate, a clear day, the sky in the morning before sunrise is bluish-gray, when the sun has risen it is clear steely-blue deepening to pure cerulean about the zenith, towards evening a purplish tinge prevails. Were the same clear sky suddenly to be flecked with snow-white clouds the blue would appear deeper by several shades, while should the white clouds turn purplish-gray the blue in the interstices would pale to a bluish-white. Though green is held not to match with blue, yet no more charming picture can be seen than masses of sunlit

greenish-yellow leaves, on stately trees, languidly tossed by spring's gentle gales against a hyacinth sky.

In the autumn of that wretched year 1879, on a day when at last it ceased to rain, a pretty sight attracted attention ; through a large aperture in the canopy of grayish cloud the eye gazed up into what appeared like a vast funnel leading to the highest heaven, down which there fell a flood of softened light, and up and down this shining staircase, whirling about involved in endless mazy circles, there floated a multitude of rooks, the uppermost in the very source of light diminished to the merest tiny specks, and all uttering a subdued querulous cawing which floated to the ear like music, expressing in unmistakable tones a joyous outburst of gratitude ; the conviction was irresistible—the poor birds were thanking God for fine weather !

## CHAPTER VI.

### EAST ANGLIA.

**T**HE rural corner of East Anglia with which some early associations are most intimately connected was a paradise of birds. A breezy Common lying high on one side the village, a level Mere lying low on the other—both now, alas! enclosed—afforded congenial haunts to almost every species of bird known in England, save only those whose constant home is by the sea. A fine champaign country spreads around, mostly in a high state of cultivation, but sweetly diversified with wilder patches and abounding in quiet nooks—wide ponds in silent bye-ways, sheltered by whispering trees—secluded open pasture places, where the ruminating cows used to gaze at the passing stranger—foot-paths by the margin of purling brooks, or through the homely fields over many a rustic stile—vocal groves and solemn woods, whose dim seclusion used to make childish hearts beat with a vague alarm—and bosky lanes, all carpeted with green and decked with flowering weeds, where holiday hours sped lightly away over the heads of idle children, contented with sunshine, wild fruits, and the friendship of the birds. There was one green lane, retired from haunts of men, where only adventurous boys dare ramble, for the tall figure of the Squire was terrible and the ruined Cottage in its wasted garden a place of fear ; yet the

squire was very seldom encountered and the desolate cottage smiled pleasantly enough in the bright hours of morning, while all the rural spoils which boys most prize were to be found in "D——r's Green Lane." So that all through the brightest hours of spring and summer, the privacy of that shady retreat would be invaded by little errant knights, rebels against the tyranny of superstition. On such occasions, should the tall figure of the squire be seen approaching, slowly pacing round a tangled clump of blossomed hawthorn that almost barred the way, the rebels, most of them,—as rebels are wont to do when the courage of their opinions has to be wound up to the sticking point,—would fly; but one brave urchin might remain, with an ill suppressed tear gathering in his eye yet resolution setting firm his jaw, and then he would see the sad squire face to face! A tall figure, once graceful, now with stooping shoulders, dressed in a blue coat with broad brass buttons, drab coloured breeches, Hessian boots, and a spotless cravat arranged in careful folds around the neck, some delicate frilling showing at the wrists and between the collar of a richly embroidered vest; but, oh the grayness of that gray gray face!—gray with grayness deadlier than the natural blight of years, the skin and the hair appeared of but one complexion, so that no features were discernible, until a wan smile broke across them as the squire returned the boy's respectful salute: instantly fading away as a watery sunbeam fades on wintry hills, and giving place to a settled frown. Then the squire would pass on, walking slowly; but no word would escape his lips, only a murmuring sound that might have been a smothered sigh or a whispered malediction.

Here is a scanty sheet of age-dyed letter paper, with

ribbed surface and broken seal, covered with faded writing in a stiff hand, the formal lines not perfectly straight, but in a gentle curve, maintained with easy regularity from top to bottom as if printed in some eccentric press, which begins thus :

"Good Mr. D——r." (The name being that of one of our old aristocratic families). "Your letter dated 22<sup>nd</sup> ins<sup>t</sup> came not to my hand till the 26<sup>th</sup>, and as you therein make no mention of having recei<sup>d</sup> mine dated the 12<sup>th</sup> ins<sup>t</sup>, fear it hath either miscarry'd or been intercepted, w<sup>ch</sup> indeed I should be very sorry for, and would now send you copy thereof, but expecting your good company pretty soon at Green Street, think y<sup>e</sup> contents thereof may be deferr'd till then. . . . Thursday last I had the pleasure of seeing my neece Stanhope who is newly returned from her Kentish expedition, she promised to acquaint you by that nights post y<sup>t</sup> she intended coming in Easter Holy days, to continue some time at Green Street, and then will be a proper season for meeting her here.

"I shall not fail acquainting you how we proceed, and hope 'twill be to the mutual satisfaction of you and of

"Good Mr. D——r,

"Y<sup>r</sup> well wisher and friend,

"Green Street,

"C. G——d.

"Mar<sup>ch</sup> 30<sup>th</sup>, 1751.

"My kind respects attend you and yours.

"Bad news flies so swift y<sup>t</sup> I need not men-

"tion y<sup>e</sup> national calamity by the decease of

"our beloved and hopeful Prince."

And this "good Mr. D——r" was our sad squire's father, and "*neece Stanhope*," a blooming maid in March, 1751, was his mother, full then of pleasant family traditions, and looking forward to transmit them to future generations; the men of the family, instinct with the rancorous party spirit of the day, as that allusion to "*our beloved and hopeful Prince*" testifies;—besotted Frederick, whose only

achievement in life (he died, no boy, at forty-four), was quarrelling with the king his father !

No peasant passed, if he could possibly help it, the little ruined garden of an evening, and when children chased along the winding lane the painted butterfly, they instantly paused, following it no further only with wistful gaze, if the fluttering creature's wayward flight took sudden line across that desolate spot ; the silly insect, even, drifting rapidly away as if no sweets were there to tempt its appetite. And yet there were borders of tawny marigolds, and white and ruddy "hen-and-chickens," half choked by overbearing weeds ; and rose bushes run wild, with odorous petals dropping on the moss grown path ; and cherry trees, once laden with sanguine fruit in spring ; and plums for summer ; and broad espaliers, overgrown with idle shoots, where once the ripened apples hung thick in mellow autumn—and now there was no hand to gather them ! There were no towers about this ruined cottage nor dismal dungeons ; no human being had ever been cruelly done to death there, stabbed with a dagger, hung up by the neck to the lord's gibbet, nor walled up alive in obdurate masonry that family secrets might be surely kept ; yet the romance of human story was not wanting there. Life had flowed on in pleasant ripples about that rustic dwelling and encircling garden, the violent deaths had been only of humming bees stifled with sulphur at the approach of winter to rob them of their luscious summer spoils, or of unconscious fowls whose silly necks were twisted that their plump bodies plucked and trussed might duly furnish forth the market stall in season, with yellow butter and milk-white eggs. The natural deaths to human kind had come slowly, in ripe

old age when it is meet to drop away weary at last of the gentle pilgrimage, and when all the scenes of the homely drama had been acted through—rocking of the wicker cradle with murmur of old tunes and drowsy throb of the recording clock, sports of childhood, and love and fruitful marriage, manful struggle with seasons and stock and crops until the slow advent of the days of aching bones. Yet all through this bustling lapse of life, with its household cares and with its ever beginning never ending labours of good husbandry, there was leisure to taste the golden goblet as Time passed it round, to sip and ponder the true flavour of life's inevitable draught, finding we trust some spice of joy therein, missed when the wine is gulped in feverish haste. There was time then to stay and sniff the fragrant lavender, or to pinch a bit of southernwood, chatting over the gate with the good man in the garden, giving and taking "the time of day;" or to discuss with Biddy, in her muslin stomacher, the manifold merits of the obese pig whose doom was fixed for Innocent's day; or for gallant youth, brave in his velvet vest, to gather a fresh posy for blooming Bess, while she adorned herself, and so presently, when she came down arrayed in figured kirtle and wreathed with smiles, there was leisure, by the morning sun, for those twain to stroll along the summer pathway to the old church where the sabbath bells were chiming dreamily. These homely folk had little store of silver or copper coin and never scarcely any gold, but they had the riches which kindly nature gives to those obedient children who worship her humbly and love her righteous laws.

Once a daring boy, his courage screwed to high emprise and going alone lest timid counsels should prevail, pushed

open the dragging door through opposing heap of fallen masonry and stood upon the wide-flagged floor of the cottage parlour. There was no sign of life, nothing to move or stir, no hangings to wave, no curtain to rustle with suggestive motion, but down the silent walls were dark streaks where the winter rains had long leaked through, and on the rusty hob, framed round with broken tiles whereon in quaint blue figures was limned the story of Lot's wife, stood a homely kettle, its shining copper face long tarnished, whereof the lid, sealed down for years, yielding to a vigorous tug came away with a snap and disclosed the vessel half full of discoloured water. Strange! had that vessel, blinking bright, singing cosily through the sunny Sunday afternoon, been waiting ever since to brew the fragrant beverage, when Bessie and the velvet-vested youth should return? And had he never come! There in the corner among a little heap of mouldering household rubbish lies a small chopine, with wooden heel pierced by the worms and all the gay tags and laces long since gone to dust; ah! pretty Vanity! ever the same, for your plump limbs that dainty shoe must surely have been a world too small! And did blooming Bess come back alone, with a trace of tears upon her ashen face? and did she kick the pinching shoe aside, declaring the day too hot and the cruel world gone wrong? while the old folks brooked some darker storm—then sank beneath the sudden evil!

At the Hall—the interior never seen until pitying Death had beckoned the sad squire away from brooding on his life-long sorrow, and the aged serving-woman, the only person he ever trusted all his solitary life, had been left free to call in a bevy of stout wenches to dust and polish—



strange things were whispered ; how one bed-room, never opened to the light of day, contained a stately bed rich with damask hangings and silken coverlet and snow-white sheets ; how in a cabinet off the dining-room, kept under jealous lock and key, a portrait of a lovely lady painted by a master hand reclined against the wall, with a fracture as of an angry heel dashed through the senseless simpering face ; and how in the wide coach-house a stately carriage stood, covered with years of dust, that was to have whirled away a tall bridegroom and a lovely lady-bride upon a tour of bliss, but whose wheels had never turned since the day they came there new. Some sudden blast must have fallen, as a cold untimely wind may come shearing with cruel intruding edges the sunshine life of August. Some whispered scandal, just upon the eve of ripe fruition, about a village belle. God wot ! not true, perhaps ? And so the tall squire, in his prime of early manhood, looking forward to perpetuating with increase of honour his family and its traditions, suddenly choked with bitterness and turned his sad heart to inward grieving for ever ! And blooming Bess, did she swallow salt tears, instead of sipping that fragrant cup ? And what became of the youth in the plum-coloured velvet-waistcoat ? And where did Bessie wander away, over the world bare-foot, after she kicked off her high-heeled shoe ? Who shall say !—whether she ever wandered at all, or whether even she ever had cause to wander, none ever told. The lovely lady with the smirking face married another gallant, a great nobleman the lord of many acres, and she grew to be a stately dame, shining like a fair diamond on the blazing forehead of society ; yet hearing at long intervals a contemptuous whisper about the sad squire, and

about his miserly ways and the ruinous condition of his very respectable property. The whole of his estate in that corner of East Anglia the sad squire, as known in later days, kept in his own hands, farming high and reaping every harvest large stores of grain ; but not a kernel of it ever went to market. Barns and granaries piled high with bursting rotten bags, rick-yards crowded with discoloured stacks, legions of rats and mice and an army of half-wild cats preying upon them ; such was the state of things at the Hall farm. The labourers went about their work in a dogged silent way ; they were well paid, but they felt it was a dolesome harvest when the honest sheaves were cut and garnered only that they might rot and moulder. There was a hollowness in the laughter which went round when the story got wind, how that old Dickey Martin the thatcher, having first wheedled out of the jealous-handed house-keeper an extra cup of old strong beer, mounted his ladder to thatch the great barley rick for the tenth time, and so stepping incautiously upon the treacherous pile Dickey's shrivelled frame—no heavier than a crow's—whirpled slowly down to the bottom through a cloud of dust, scattering an army of rats who scuttled out at every run, while poor Dickey, fain to follow after them, regained the light of day ingloriously on hands and knees. Nature, abhorring the vacuum and determined to raise the flag of life and liberty amid all this decay and death, sent up a lusty ash sapling through the last new coat of thatch, just where the incautious thatcher fell, which growing and flourishing in its strange position was called ever after "Dickey Martin's Tree."

The poor were never heard to complain of the sad squire's

conduct on account of *Money* wanted ; true, they grumbled loud and deep, but their sole complaint against him was—the evil thing making him hateful in their eyes and over-riding any sense of gratitude they might have felt for payment of liberal wages—that he kept the *Bread* out of the mouth of the poor. For this thing they deemed him accursed !

There is a deep natural truth inherent in the true economy of every commonwealth, which the lower classes (the great suffering silent class) feel, but cannot in logical statement express, that those born upon the land have a right to live upon the land ; he who wilfully destroys corn or withholds it from starving mouths being in their eyes a murderer !

At present our labouring classes look to the union work-house, that smug invention of the age of steam and iron, as a place they have a *right* to go to. Will they be satisfied with rights of such a kind when they come to be more enlightened, or shall we succeed in averting a possible great danger by rousing in their feeble breasts some of the latent energies of their northern ancestors, teaching them to expend them as the northmen did upon distant shores, or better still upon our own ? However this may be it is certain the peasantry in that corner of East Anglia bore no good-will to the sad squire, and so he lived on, a sordid lonely wasted life, piling up stores of unwholesome rottenness around him. There was a gruesome devil had possession of that place ! Shall I tell you his name ?

SELFISHNESS !

There are some crimes recognized as such by men but not punishable by human law, and of this class was the crime of the sad squire, hugging his own selfish grief careless of how

it might affect his fellow creatures ; for the great basis of good common law is that a man shall be at liberty to do as he likes with his own, such personal liberty to be restrained only when it affects injuriously the public weal, and men hitherto have not seen their way how to restrain personal liberty or private right akin to that set up by the sad squire, although they are beginning to see their way to do so, and may possibly see their way yet a little further in that direction before the world grows wearily older. On the other hand, there are some crimes distinctly recognised as such by our laws and severely punishable thereby, which yet men in their perverseness will not look upon as crimes, keeping their necks the rather entangled in the harness of the old Adam and sympathizing with the malefactors, and of this class are poaching and smuggling.

Striking inland from the coast out Lowestoff way one night, a Smuggler—one of the landsman confederate class, a small farmer in fact—was toiling along a solitary road with his horse and cart heavily laden with smuggled schnapps, or as the country people called it, Hollands-gin. Long engaged in the contraband traffic he had never been detected or even suspected, neither by the coast-guard whose lines he generally stole through in the darkness, nor yet by his neighbours whose inquisitive eyes he had to face during daylight, though the actual labour of unloading and storing in a secret place was accomplished invariably in the dead of night unknown to any living soul save himself and his wife. The night was a bright moonlight one, and he had travelled on all day hoping to reach home in the early gloaming before the moon arose, but by some means his cart dragged heavier and heavier, until, just at the entrance

to a village through which he must pass and when within two miles of home, the off-wheel suddenly collapsed, the cart with its precious load came lumbering down, and the labouring horse stood still! Here was a horrible position! the cart was fixed, immovable, the tell-tale tubs scattered about the road, the moonlight bright as day, and the hour not so late but that it was highly probable some wayfarer might approach at any moment passing either to or from the village. Ruin, so long evaded, now stared him in the face; he dare neither leave his property in that condition, the cart known to every child in the village, nor go to seek assistance, equally risking detection. Oh! that the accursed wheel had held out but one short half-hour longer, he would have been safe at home! While in this state of helplessness and indecision, the perspiration pouring down his forehead from mental agony, he suddenly hears a horse's hoofs upon the road, jog, jog, a steady trot, heralding the near approach of some respectable neighbour! What shall he do? The decision must be instantaneous! He determines to throw himself upon the generosity of the new comer, and to implore his aid and secrecy! He starts forward for that purpose with uplifted hands, when confusion!—he confronts the head-constable. Now clever as the smuggler's management had been, the head-constable had in fact long suspected him secretly of something "strange," though he guessed not what, and he now sat on his horse looking coldly down upon the discomfited man, his capsized conveyance and the kegs of hollands, with a mingled feeling of gratified vanity that his professional instincts had proved true, and of painful surprise at the serious nature of the business; but though professionally stern the great

official was not really a hard-hearted man, and there is in the human breast a latent spark which the current of sympathy may fire, if only it be set free by a sufficiently powerful shock of emotion.

“For the love of God!” exclaimed the smuggler, in a hissing whisper, “help me, Mr. —, or I am a ruined man, and my poor wife and children beggars!” The mysterious spark of sympathy was ignited! Within half-an-hour after the utterance of that appeal, the respectable head-constable might have been seen, had anyone more human than the Man-in-the-Moon been looking on, trundling a cartwheel along the road towards the broken-down smuggler! He had left his horse in charge of the man in distress, had been home, taken a wheel off his own cart, and was now returning to help the contrabandist to refit! And he *did* help him effectually; and by dint of their united labour the smuggler ran his cargo in safety! This tale was never told save only to a few friends who had the privilege of tasting some excellent hollands at the hospitable mansion of the respectable Mr. —, head-constable, and — landowner; and not to them until long after the event. The smuggler made Mr. — a present of a ‘tub’ that night, and what is more to the purpose conferred upon him his undying gratitude. I can certify the quality of the Schnapps was excellent, and I believe occasion eventually arose to test the quality of the gratitude, when it also proved genuine: certainly a much rarer spirit than smuggled Hollands!

Spreading round from the breezy Common to the level Mere, there was an expanse of land which was farmed and

in part owned by a clever gentleman, who could grow four crops where his neighbours grew only three; and one of his favourite crops was turnip-seed. All through the sunny months of spring and summer the heavy atmosphere was laden with the strong odour of the growing seeds, most powerful when the yellow blossoms were just beginning to give place to the seed vessels; and the air at times was almost darkened by multitudes of seed-eating birds, which resorted thither to feed upon the ripening spoils, appearing to flock from all parts of the neighbourhood, though without apparently diminishing the number of their species in adjoining localities, so far at least as my observation enabled me to judge. Sparrows, yellowhammers, but chiefly linnets, both gray and green, were the principal members of this feathered army, whose onslaughts were repelled, and and whose wily tactics circumvented by an opposing army of small boys, "bird keepers" who, armed with broad wooden clappers, kept up an incessant din, occasionally varied by war-whoops of the shrillest pitch, and not infrequently by mellow cries, or by quaint rondels of bird-boy lore, soft and musical when heard from a shady distance, floating on the wings of little fluttering zephyrs, born but to die in the sultry sunshine.

I never saw the Rose linnet (commonly taken for a distinct species) so numerous in any other district as he was in this, conspicuous in all his pride of burnished summer plumage. The glossy red-rose colour of the breast and forehead, the distinguishing badge of the male brown linnet in his prime, appears to vary in brilliance according to the condition of the bird, being most highly developed when he is placed under the most favourable conditions. Under very un-

favourable conditions, such as confinement in a cage, the rose-colour is entirely absent.

We now have laws restraining the too prevalent propensity to destroy small birds, but such wise enactments will be more likely to have full effect when the persons whose interests are most at stake become fully enlightened as to the usefulness of these innocent creatures. With respect to the soft-billed insect-eating birds, there appears to be now a growing popular opinion that they ought to be protected; but lingering doubts remain about the hard-billed seed-eaters. Such doubts ought to be dispelled. Sparrows and other hard-billed birds destroy an immense quantity of noxious seeds as well as corn before the arable lands are cleared, while their after-harvest foraging can only be an unmixed good. In the spring, before the farmers' crops are ripe or even "kerned," the energies of these birds are taxed to the utmost to provide food for their ravenous young, the staple of which is caterpillars, small grubs, and such soft forms of embryo insect life; the quantity of those pests so destroyed being incalculable. The farmer who wantonly kills a pair of sparrows in winter, insures the lives of thousands of pernicious grubs, that will ravage his crops in the spring with impunity. Upon farm-lands where weeds "get the upper hand," and in untidy hedges obscured by a tall growth of blowing thistles, the little industrious scavengers may be seen at work—sparrows, linnets, chaffinches, goldfinches, feeding on the ripening seeds, which unless so destroyed would float over the soil, borne on every passing breeze, to propagate their kind an hundred fold.

On some fallows temporarily thrown out of cultiva-



tion, and in a neglected condition owing to change of tenancy,—that process generally so stupidly mismanaged, and resulting in such serious evil!—where the “docks” rear high their heads of tawny ripening seeds, I have seen of late such swarms of greenfinches industriously carrying on their work of beneficial destruction, that one’s mind is filled with wonder as to whence all the birds can have come. I think the congregation of multitudes of greenfinches for the purpose of feeding on the seeds of injurious weeds a far more remarkable fact than the swarming of linnets about the crops of turnip-seed; and certainly it is one demanding the admiration as well as the most serious consideration of the agriculturist.

The shiftless Mahometan, whom we are so apt to despise, religiously protects the storks and vultures who cleanse his streets; the more enlightened British farmer on the other hand, simply from sheer want of thought, or to pass away an idle moment, will at one fell discharge of his shot-gun knock down a score or two of poor little dock-and-thistle-seed eaters! Nor is this wanton spirit of destruction for mere destruction’s sake confined to those whom we may charitably assume know no better; it is rampant among so called naturalists, who disfigure the columns of such highly respectable and useful journals as are devoted to rural matters with the small chronicles of their silly conduct. For instance, one of these gentlemen will place on record such a feat as this:—“On the — inst. I encountered a flock of no less than seven of those very rare little *Fringillidæ* the —, all females. I shot two of the interesting little visitors at the first discharge, and following them up was fortunate enough to get another

easy shot when I dropped one, after which by dint of severe and persistent stalking I succeeded in shooting three more, thus destroying no less than six out of the whole seven of these very shy little birds, leaving one solitary specimen alive, which perhaps some other naturalist as ardent as myself may have the good luck to fall in with, in which case I hope he will give a good account of it. It is much to be regretted these pretty little creatures do not oftener visit our shores. They used formerly I believe to stay and breed with us!" But not only does the evanescent literature of the day admit the records of such acts, even the pages of standard works on ornithology repeat them—one such book on British Birds being so continuous a record of destruction that to read it is quite painful!

In early life, I had the honour to make the acquaintance of a family of whom the father, Barnabas Bartrum, commonly known as "Barney Bartrum," was a sawyer; the son and heir, Barnabas Bartrum, junior, commonly called "Young Barney," or "Barney," occasionally assisted his father in the pit; and one or two buxom daughters were at service; while the remainder of the children, numbering in all somewhere about a baker's dozen, lived with their parents, the mother being a common-place sort of woman, in a little cottage standing in a garden retired a few rods from the edge of the open common. My confederate was "Barney," the son and heir, who in age was some few years my senior, but in experience the disparity was greater.

This family regularly introduced into their heritage of toil—due order of precedence being observed—all its male scions as bird-keepers among the turnip-seed; the clever

gentleman, who could grow four crops where others grew three, having a good opinion of the boys, and so he regularly received them season after season in that humble capacity at the established rate of initial wages—twopence per day. At the time I first knew Barney, his muscles were not sufficiently set to enable him to encounter the severe labour in the pit permanently, but he used occasionally to tug at the saw; as the young son of the neighbouring landed proprietor might, when of age, occasionally take his seat as a lawgiver on the magisterial Bench: the chief difference being that whereas the one boy, however clumsy, could only lacerate insensate wood; the other, in his efforts to pull through the hard judicial part set before him, might lacerate human hearts,—luckily the hearts he had to practise upon belonged almost wholly to the silent class, as little likely to cry out under any infliction as the denser log! Barney was a lad who, had he been born in a primitive combative age, would have been a Fabian general and a counsellor, or if a North American Indian, would have been a Path-finder, and might in course of years have attained that mature dignity which furnished a Cooper with his grand idea of “Leather Stocking;” certainly, combined with his remarkable and overmastering natural aptitude for wood-craft, he had the nous to adapt himself to uncongenial circumstances. Where Barney got it all from nobody knew; his qualities could scarcely have been hereditary, unless they were a kind of ‘sport’ tracing back for many generations. Barney, senior, was a spindle-limbed, stiff-backed man, who in matters of wild sports scarcely knew a hawk from a her’nshaw, or, as he himself might have said, a *handsaw*; while the good dame, his wife, and young

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Barney's mother, had a wooden face, and could never correctly reckon up her change at the village shop ; and as for the other juvenile Bartrums, Barney's brothers and sisters, they were simple enough, their usual conversation being mostly inarticulate, and expressed in monosyllabic whisperings behind pinafores, or gigglings behind rosy fingers according to age and sex, and apt to be suddenly disconcerted by inharmonious snorts followed by red-hot blushes.

Barney had a general knowledge of all the fields and woods for several miles around ; knew the way to every neighbouring village, and the field paths and bye-lanes which led to them by the shortest cuts ; he could pilot little children to the mossy banks where violets grew, or to the dewy meadows most richly decked with cowslips, or eager lads to the brooks where beds of watercresses spread, or to the old pastures most "likely for mushrooms." Winter was scarcely past, ere he "knew of" a mavis's nest ; and all through the spring and early summer he had a continual round of visits to pay, chiefly done at earliest morn, to birds' nests of every description, keeping a mental calendar and record of all their domestic concerns ; thus, "Blackbird, building, thorn bush Le Grys' Rushy Ground : French sparrow, alder tree the Mere, three eggs : Blood-linnet, hard sitten on, Twelve Acre seed piece, top fence by Common : King Harry, in crab tree, D—r's Green Lane, and Hedgehack just under in brow of ditch, both young ones."

But poor Barney was endowed with a more recondite knowledge ; which he had early learnt to distrust, as leading on to dreadful crime, and direful punishment according to

righteous laws, which were respected and enforced by all society, saving only a few rough men whose hand was against everybody, but whose company he heartily disliked, and whose secret overtures he steadily repulsed. Yet could he not resist the fearful joy, and to a bosom crony he would entrust the trembling secrets that he knew of—where the hen partridge had made her shallow nest upon the weed-grown head-land, or the grey pheasant had laid astray in the wide “double” near Sandy-Ground Stile. Squire D——r preserved in a half-hearted perfunctory way ; but the great Baron, up at the Great House, whose wide-reaching hand could be placed at any moment upon any man, was a rigid game-preservee, bred pheasants on a large scale, and was the lord of a legion of gamekeepers and watchers. Barney’s heart sank within him at the thought of the terrors these men in office had the power to wield ; he had feeling enough to consider the misery he would bring upon his parents, and upon his little brothers and sisters, if he ever did any thing wrong ; and fancy enough to imagine the horrors of that dreadful County jail he had heard of, where some of those rough men had been, while their children went ragged and their wives grew besotted at home, and so he early determined that nothing should induce him to touch fur or feather, nest or egg of any creature that could even by any—the most strained—ingenuity be called game.

“It wo’n’t do, Master Walter,” Barney would say, “it wo’n’t do, you know ! I *should* like *just once* to breed up a nest o’ young partridges, under our little specky bantam, they’re such nice little creturs, and I’d let them all go again, ’cept *just one* just to fat up and roast,—they say its nicer

than bacon ! and I should like *just once* for mother to taste a bit, and to taste a bit *just once* myself, but it wo'n't do, Master Walter, it's wicked, and if he caught me at it, that young keeper, Hugh Crisp, would send me to Blankshire jail."

And so poor Barney, with his wonderful good sense and natural good nature, and astute perception of the extreme value of civility, not to say servility, managed to rub on pretty well, steering clear of all the quicksands which beset him, while continuing to indulge his roving propensities.

"That boy of Barney Bartrum's," the great baron's head-keeper would say, "do appear to be a strange boy ; but I'm a pretty good judge, I think, and I do *not* consider there's evil in him. He's a fool, sir, but he aint evil ! If I thought he was guilty of any evil, I'd soon root him up, sir, but I do *not* ! I have my eye upon him, sir ; mooning about, and I'd soon root him up if I thought he was guilty of any evil, sir, but at present I do *not*."

The truth was, the head-keeper was proud of his office, not pompous but properly alive to his responsibilities, and Barney was a born judge of character ; the brim of Barney's battered hat was worn bare with touching, but he touched it to no other man as he touched it to the head-keeper ; not even to the great baron himself, for in his presence Barney pushed back the battered hat, and tugged incessantly at his forelock. Stewards, keepers, woodmen, parson, squire, and parish constable, all had a kindly, if somewhat contemptuous, word for Barney ; the steward liked to see lads come to attention smartly as he rode by ; the clergyman considered the youth peculiar, possessed of

unusual intelligence, but nevertheless it must be admitted, not, as was too often the case with clever boys of his class, distinctly vicious; and the parish constable had "seen 'im carryin' a snake, an' lookin' into bird's nestes without takin' of 'em; but always know'd 'im touch 'is 'at respectful, and never 'e'rd 'im hutter no bad langwidge—no never!"

There was only one man poor Barney could not conciliate, and that was Hugh Crisp, who was a new under-keeper from some "swell" estate near London; for all Barney's adroitness could not quite conceal the feeling of slight contempt he felt for the "cockney," as a man who was a gamekeeper, but did not understand game. One fatal day for him, Barney was able to do some slight service for the head-keeper, which, unconsciously to the lad, proved the dictum of Mr. Crisp to have been wrong—something about a "cock" being to be found in a wisp of trees near a rushy corner of the Mere; and the young sawyer felt from that hour a presentiment of coming evil.

One day I came upon him carefully pacing and measuring the road near the angle of a lonely bye-lane, with an eager troubled expression upon his honest face, which told me instantly that evil had overtaken him.

"What is the matter, Barney?" said I.

"Oh! Master Walter," said Barney, touching his worn beaver, "I'm just measuring the road a bit; that's all!"

"Measuring the road a bit! But what for, Barney?"

"Oh, it aint much consequence, perhaps, else I'd 'a' brought father's two-foot rule; but just here runs the borough boundary, down along Hangman Lane here; but

by which fence, whether by north side or south side, nobody seems to know!"

"But why are you so anxious about the borough boundary? Come, out with it, Mister Barney Bartrum, there's some scrape you've gotten yourself into."

"Look here now, Master Walter; I'll tell you all about it. Sit down here, on the parapet of the bridge, and I shall be glad to tell you all my trouble." So said the poor fellow, older and bigger than myself; and I felt very sad to see him so down-hearted, though I tried hard to rally him and look cheerful.

"Master Walter—Master Walter! Last night about eight o'clock, I had been to look at a wood-quest's nest in that little clump of tall firs just below the higher corner of Birch-hanger. I didn't climb the tree—you can't climb it, it would have been no use if I could. I only wanted to make sure she was building; and I meant to take you there, to show you how nicely they hide the nest, right in the heart in the top of the fir tree. Well, as I was coming back home, who should I meet here, standing on the crown of this bridge, but Mister Crisp, and a queer-looking fellow with him, some cockney friend; he'd got his gun over his shoulder, and a black retriever with him, and they stood right across the lane to bar my way.

"'Holloa!' says Mister Crisp, 'now I've caught you at last, young man; pull them wires out of your pocket!'

"'I've got no wires, Mister Crisp,' says I, touching my hat.

"'You have,' says he, 'we see you putting 'em down by



Birch-Hanger Coppice ; didn't we, Henery ? only he heard us make a noise, and put 'em in his pocket again.'

" 'Yes !' says Henery, ' I see you puttin' down a wire by Birch-Hanger Coppice with my own eyes, only you heard us make a noise and you put 'em in your pocket again. That's true, s'help me never !' "

" 'And I've got to search you !' says Mister Crisp.

" 'And we've got to search you, s'help me !' says Henery.

" 'Search me, and welcome !' I said ; but as they stepped forward to do it the man he called ' Henry' trod on poor old Gip, you know the old black retriever, and there was a kind of a blunder, and in a moment there was Mister Crisp on his hands and knees in the road.

" 'What did you do that for, you young blackguard ?' he roared, getting up on his knees.

" 'What did you do that for, you dem'd young blackguard ?' roared Henery.

" 'I beg your pardon, Mister Crisp,' I said, touching my hat, 'but I did nothing !' "

" 'Didn't you,' said he, jumping to his feet in a fury, 'you lying young villain, take that !' and he let out straight from the shoulder and hit me a blow in the eye ; see, look where he cut open my cheek !' "

" 'Didn't you !' cried Henery, 'you dem lying young villain ! take that !' and he too aimed a blow ; but *his* was not very terrible, I put it aside and gave him *one* that made him duck and roar as if a wasp had stung him."

"The deuce you did !" I exclaimed, "and what next pray, Mr. Barnabus Bartrum, junior ?"

"What next? why then I ran away!"

"Very judicious under the circumstances, sir; but what has the borough boundary to do with it at all?"

"Why just this, Master Walter; if the alleged assault took place within the borough bounds, I shall have to appear before Mr. Silverthorn; and if without them, then before the great baron and the county magistrates."

"But do you mean then to proceed against Crisp and his cockney friend?" I inquired.

"I, Master Walter?—not I! What's the use of one like me proceeding against the great baron's keeper?—all I can do is to be prepared and hope for the best."

"I fear," said I, beginning to have a dim perception of the real situation, "you must not hope for the jurisdiction of simple Mr. Silverthorn; but cheer up, Barney, the principles of British justice are the same everywhere, and besides, seeing they were the unprovoked aggressors, the keeper and his friend will hardly dare to meddle with you."

"Ah! I don't think you know much about it," said Barney quietly.

In the course of a few days I found, truly, I did *not* know much about it, and before the next assembly of the magistrates for the County of Blankshire, division of Wickam, in Petty Sessions at the Town Hall at Bodshall, I learnt many things I had not known before. I learnt *generally*, that LAW, which should be the active expression of public righteousness, is an engine respected by the public only in the abstract, and set in motion practically only by private persons. So that if he who hath money contem-

plates doing a bad action, or contemplates doing what he erroneously conceives to be a good action, his proper course is to do it by formal process of law—the method made perfectly plain to him by experts, for a consideration—thereby gaining the present respect and goodwill of his neighbours, and also a reversionary interest in a favourable verdict. I also learnt *particularly*, that about this trivial matter of an alleged assault, a complication of legal machinery would or might be set in motion, the which to oppose with any chance of success would cost Barney Bartrum, junior, who had not half-a-crown in the whole world, the respectable sum of at least one hundred pounds.

Soon after our interview Barney received and showed to me an official document, with the Royal Arms emblazoned thereon and with a seal representing the Royal Crown appended thereto, which ran somewhat thus :—

“BLANKSHIRE  
to wit.

“To Barnabus Bartrum junior of the Higher  
Common parish of Slobury County of Blankshire  
Sawyer.

“~~Whereas~~ information hath this day been laid before me the undersigned one of Her Majesty’s Justices of the Peace in and for the said County of Blankshire for that you the said Barnabas Bartrum junior on the — day of — 18— at the parish of Slobury in the said County of Blankshire did unlawfully assault beat wound and put in grievous bodily fear Hugh Crisp of Slobury aforesaid contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided.

“These are therefore to command you in Her Majesty’s Name to be and appear on Saturday the — day of — 18— at twelve o’clock at noon at the Town Hall in Bodshall in the said County before such Justice of the Peace for the said County as may then be there to answer the said information and to be further dealt with according to law.

“Given, &c., &c.”

Now this was a serious and respectable document carrying conviction on the face of it to any unprejudiced mind, as all to whom it was shown—conscious as they all were of being unprejudiced—would have said had they cared to utter an opinion ; but they all kept silent, the truth being that there was no mind unprejudiced, but all were deeply prejudiced ; first by true and proper respect for law, and all the venerable forms thereof ; secondly by the sight of the effigies of the Royal Arms and the Royal Crown upon the summons ; and thirdly by the highly respectable and influential signature—being that of a powerful local magistrate—appearing at the foot of it. None but a mind of superior calibre and also specially trained can really be unprejudiced in such matters, and where was there in all that neighbourhood such a mind, to throw its ægis over poor wretched Barney !

But if one summons drives a force, as of conviction, into the breasts of the lieges, two summonses carry twofold conviction, and Barney had two ! The second official document, in form like the first, varied in one important particular to this effect, that “Barnabas Bartrum, junior, &c., did unlawfully assault beat wound and put in grievous bodily fear Henry Doublehook of the parish of Clerkenwell in the City of London gentleman.” So that it was doubly clear Barnabas Bartrum, junior, was a dangerous and violent person, against whom it was necessary, for the sake of the peace of Her Majesty the Queen’s subjects, punitive measures should be put in force, and that severely, *according to* LAW.

I appealed to the great baron but he was “not at

home." I appealed to the sad squire, but he would rather not interfere in a matter which concerned his neighbour the baron, and he added peevishly, "I seldom sit on the bench, you know." I appealed to the doctor, but he had examined the wounds of Messrs. Crisp and Doublehook, and was retained on the other side. I appealed to the rector, but he considered it contrary to the plain duty of a christian gentleman to prejudge "a case"; and generally I fear I got myself the character of a foolish young busybody.

And so with a heavy heart in my bosom and a light fee of one guinea in my pocket, I went to the neighbouring town of Bodshall to seek the services of a lawyer. After much seeking and many denials, I at length found one who assumed to himself the character of a Tribune of the People. This good man listened patiently to my statement of facts and eloquent comments thereon; heard, with a grave closing of the eye, my suggestion, that owing to a question of *boundary* the jurisdiction of the county magistrates might possibly be quashed; and more especially seemed deeply touched when I feelingly alluded to the poverty of his client. Fearing that in my zeal I might have trenched upon his tender susceptibilities more than I had warrant to do, seeing that I meant to pay him a retaining fee and had it in my hand, I modestly placed the one sovereign in gold and one shilling in silver upon his official table, when he instantly spread, not greedily, but yet firmly, his open palm upon the money, assumed with a gentle frown an abstracted air, gazing at a grimy cobweb dependent from the ceiling, and so continued for the space of a minute or more in deep thought, while his fingers slowly and mechanically conveyed the gold coin to his breeches pocket and buttoned it up.

This trifling operation unconsciously completed, the Tribune's posture of profound abstraction suddenly relaxed, he smiled in an animated manner, took up with curious finger the solitary shilling, twirled it up in the air briskly, once, twice, thrice, catching it each time with remarkable dexterity, assured me he had mastered the case perfectly in all its bearings, that as a tribune of the people he felt it his especial duty and privilege to lower the pride of a bloated aristocracy, that (this in the same breath) he possessed great influence with the Crown, the Lord Chancellor, and all the judges, that the various benches of magistrates throughout East Anglia, consisting of the aristocracy and landed gentry (to some of whom he was distantly related) dreaded his appearance in a case of this sort, that he knew Slobury very well, that his wife, there was not the slightest shadow of a doubt in the world about it, was a connection of the great baron's first cousin, so that possibly *family influence* might be brought to bear upon the matter, and that generally if any one could do the trick for this *unfortunate* young friend of mine he, as a tribune of the people, was the very man to do it, and so amid a storm of volubility, designed I fear to prevent further utterance on my part, ringing the bell for his clerk to show me to the outer door, he politely bowed me from his presence !

When the day of trial arrived I was astonished at the array of witnesses which had assembled at Bodshall on behalf of the great baron, who as in duty bound and like the good master he was, protected his servant, Hugh Crisp, in the execution of his duty. I wondered at the time how it was possible a gentleman could lend himself to such an elaborate scheme for crushing, as it were, a fly ; but I have

since learnt more of such matters, and know that this prosecution was the result rather of a system than of personal malice, and that probably the great baron knew little or nothing about the matter. The family solicitor to the great baron was an aged gentleman of the highest social respectability and most unsullied professional reputation, who never throughout his long career had soiled his fingers with a doubtful case, nor for the last twenty years of his practice even with a small one. But as doubtful cases and small cases will arise, and as the world would not go round if we were always to be sifting such matters to the bottom, it was the custom of the great baron's highly respectable family solicitor to hand over the small cases to another firm of solicitors also highly respectable, but composed of two young men who had to earn their living and also to rise in the legal, perhaps in the great, world, and who at a nod from the great family solicitor took all the small cases off his hands. These gentlemen, Messrs. Ruff and Smeuth, were on certain terms of social intimacy with Mr. Beauchamp—the ladies of the junior families were not perhaps by the august daughters of the senior family deemed quite *comme il faut*—but occasionally Mr. Smeuth and occasionally even Mr. Ruff would be invited to dine at Dingley House, and nothing could exceed the respectability of the connection in business matters, mostly carried on by nods, between Mr. Beauchamp and Messrs. Ruff and Smeuth. It was the source of great comfort to Mr. Beauchamp that Mr. Smeuth so thoroughly made it his study to understand a nod; there were many nods which in the ordinary course of fruition simply led to an increase of ordinary business, small matters but useful, in the office of Messrs. Ruff and

Smeuth ; but occasionally there were, though very rarely, certain peculiar nods received from Mr. Beauchamp by Mr. Smeuth, the import of which Mr. Smeuth would feel it necessary to impart to Mr. Ruff, it being thoroughly understood that Mr. Ruff should accept his instructions in such rare cases from Mr. Smeuth as if they had come originally from "the man in the street," it being "no beatified odds to me, sir," as Mr. Ruff would jocularly put it, so long as costs and charges could be entered to a safe name in the "bill book," and these particular nods or their particular interpretation were forthwith conveyed by Mr. Ruff to a Mr. Blackthorn, another legal gentleman whose career, once promising, had been blighted, and who was an utter stranger, of course, to Mr. Beauchamp, and not in any ostensible way connected even with Messrs. Ruff and Smeuth. Now, as nods or their interpretation thus filtered downwards in a channel worn by use and custom, so, occasionally, it might happen a reflex signal would be flashed along the same route, and the great baron's powerful interest be moved from below : as a river steamer plies stem on or stern on informed with the necessary motive power by the same fire. So that it is quite possible (although not provable) that the timely visit of the excellent Mr. Henry Doublehook to his friend Mr. Hugh Crisp might have occurred in consequence of some private passage between Mr. Hugh Crisp and Mr. Blackthorn—and known to them alone—when a tiny egg was dropped into the necessary ferment, subsequently to become "blown" into all the swarm of buzzing creatures assembled at the Town Hall, Bodshall.

I subsequently learnt as an undoubted fact (which had I



known it at the time would have caused me to despair even more utterly than I did of any hope of acquittal for poor Barney) that the Tribune of the People—being not without some instincts of the ferret—was fully aware of the peculiar services—lucrative though impure—occasionally performed by Mr. Blackthorn, and that he, the T. of the P., would have given his ears could he have induced Messrs, Ruff and Smeuth to transfer to him those unsavoury commissions, instead of to his darker but more taciturn rival. As I walked with the Tribune from the old-fashioned inn where his horse was put up to the Town Hall, I should have been dull indeed had I not perceived that our advocate, since the hour when I handed him the golden sovereign and the silver shilling, had not given to the matter—so important in my eyes and so vitally momentous to young Barney—a single moment's consideration. He now carried in his hand a large folded paper, which he had just extracted from a frowsy blue bag lugged along at our heels by a small boy, on which was indorsed in a bold hand, "*re* Mr. Barnabas Bartrum, junior, a. Hugh Crisp, assault and battery, and Same a. Henry Doublehook, gent., assault and battery," but which, being tightly bound with several folds of red tape, preserved from prying eyes its virgin secrets. Upon the exterior of this folded document he now hastily jotted down in pencil, as we walked along, a few memoranda of our conversation upon the points and merits of the case (or "cases" as the learned gentleman put it) remarking significantly, as we entered the hall, "to be prepared for whatever may turn up, you know!"

In one corner of the lofty Justice Room sat poor Barney

with his father, mother, and two trembling sisters, whose eyes betrayed they had been weeping—a silent little group, eyed askance by all but spoken to or encouraged by none. To them the Tribune advanced raising his hat to Barney, a courtesy which evidently puzzled the poor lad as being contrary to his usual practice ; but recovering himself he tugged his forelock, when instantly the Tribune seized the raised hand and shook it violently. Then, carefully turning his back to the Bench and his front to the people, he struck an easy attitude, displaying the folded document the while, inhaled elaborately a pinch of snuff, flinging the remainder contemptuously on the floor, and gazed steadily at his greasy friends, as who should say, “Behold me, ye people ! I am at home on these boards ! Come unto my bosom, metaphorically, any of you who are in trouble and want legal advice, and I will shield you from the poisoned darts of these tyrants !” I had quietly spoken to Barney and taken my seat at the large table, when our protector, relaxing a little, settled himself cheerfully at my side, exchanging an easy nod with Mr. Ruff, a contemptuous obeisance with Mr. Blackthorn, and directing a pert stare of recognition at the Bench, received by the assembled magnates with cold indifference. On the other side Mr. Blackthorn sat apart, endeavouring to assume perfect indifference to present things and an engrossing interest in the advertisement sheet of yesterday’s *Times* ; for the prosecution—the case having assumed, by dint of artistic manipulation, such respectable proportions—was conducted by Messrs. Ruff & Smeuth in person ; Mr. Beauchamp, who was accommodated with a chair of honour near the Bench, even condescending at intervals to break off his

conversation with the sad squire to manifest a gracious personal interest in the details.

When our case was called on the great baron good-humouredly vacated the chair, but his son, a mere youth too evidently conscious of his raw honours, remained, while the vacant seat was assumed by the white-haired Rector, who sat throughout the hearing constrained and silent, as if his benevolent yet righteous soul were overburdened with the penal codes of two worlds. I noticed as the great baron retired he exchanged a civil word, in passing, with Mister Henery Doublehook, who bowed down almost to his shiny high-lows before the patrician; a little bit of by-play which had an immediate effect in clearing the troubled brow of the worthy clerk-to-the-magistrates, who previously through his glasses had been scanning the black-coated cockney witness as a well-bred and highly-trained pointer might sniff the scent of doubtful game. Mr. Smeuth, who was a long-waisted, long-armed, long-fingered gentleman, conducted the case for the prosecution in the blindest and most deadly manner. I see him now, with his nervous right palm pressed upon the region of the hip, as if to restrain some inopportune twinge of sciatica by which his kinder feelings might be ruffled, now so tenderly alive to every consideration of pity for the prisoner, appealing to his audience with his left hand (adorned with one splendid ring) artistically balanced in a trembling half-extended attitude, as if to say, "See how anxious I am to influence you, but not for the world by other than the mildest and most gentlemanly procedure!"

It is an old, old story and not worth repeating, how the

*suggestio falsi*, adroitly used and mercilessly applied, told with terrible effect upon the undoubted facts of the defendant's history. His peculiar habits, viewed through the distorting medium plentifully supplied by the subtle eloquence of Mr. Smeuth, proved him—who was in truth a gentle harmless enthusiast—to be an habitual poacher, a sneaking vagabond, and one who could be a violent black-guard when occasion offered. “Not in this particular instance,” cried Mr. Smeuth, “without being thrust upon him (that much we willingly admit) by circumstances unfortunate for the defendant. Here, upon the crown of the bridge, stood Mr. Crisp and his friend—escape was impossible, detection imminent, and violence was the result! True it is—we admit it, and admit it with painful regret—the unfortunate young man himself received a blow, but that was a blow administered in self-defence by a—here ruffling his papers—by—a—Crisp, in the discharge of his duty: that duty he owed to one of the best of masters, whom you all know,—the noble baron, whose delicate courtesy in vacating that chair (which you, reverend sir, now so worthily fill) we all so fully appreciate; the owner of the largest, the finest, I may say, I trust without wounding the susceptibilities of any excellent landowner here, the best administered estate in this county!

But yet though the whole story is truly not worth repeating, one or two passages dwell with forcible distinctness upon my memory now. I was particularly struck by the easy way in which Mr. Smeuth, quite early in his address, alluded to the doubtful boundary at Hangman Lane, as if to a side issue of no practical moment. “I am glad to find,” said he, “the question of jurisdiction is not about to

be raised by my learned friend," bowing towards our advocate, the Tribune, who shocked me by gently rising, with bended back, 'from his seat, and murmuring some bland expressions of assent ! " but as a map has been prepared by our ingenious friend, Mr. Smudge, it may be as well your honour should have the benefit of it ! " Here-upon a burly surveyor, and his perspiring assistant, unrolled a map, so large it nearly covered the official table, ousting the law-books, which had to be piled round it, and there it lay during the trial like a placid lake fringed with legal rocks, serving only the inglorious purpose of amusing the vacant moments of unoccupied juniors ; yet, nevertheless, as a thing which had cost some great person a good deal of money, investing the prosecution with vicarious dignity.

In the same way the production of one or two wire-snares invested the case with a suspicion of poaching, carelessly (or carefully) left by the prosecution in as nebulous a state as possible. The head-keeper, proud of the opportunity for small display, certified,—“ I have seen a great many wires, gentlemen, your honours, and these be the very wires as is used by poachers for the unlawful destruction of hares. Gentlemen, your honours, I have been keeper for many years, first with the Dook of Blankshire at Gatherall Castle, then with my Lord Downagain, and other nobility, and now as head-keeper this twenty year with the best master on the finest estate in this county, and I do certify upon my honour and long experience, these be the very sort o' wires as is used by poachers for destroying hares in an unlawful manner.”

"But," said Mr. Smeuth, "we do not press the charge of poaching, a forbearance which I am sure my learned friend will appreciate;" bowing again towards the Tribune, who half rose from his seat, and bowed low in return.

And well might the charge of poaching not be pressed, seeing that the wire snares had in very truth nothing whatever to do with the matter; they were found, it is true, as Mr. Doublehook stated in the course of his evidence, in the bank of Birch Hanger, near the little clump of tall firs where the woodquest's nest was; but they had been "*sown*" there by the circumspect Mister Doublehook himself; and they were poacher's wires, it is true, as certified by the head-keeper, seeing they had been taken away from some of those rough men, whose hand was against everybody, by Hugh Crisp himself; but it never appeared to occur to any person within the Hall of Justice that these incidental matters might be intrinsically true and yet warrant no inference whatever in respect of the issue they were met to decide upon. I also cannot fail to remember how, through the whole of that wretched business, there appeared to be around us, almost palpable enough to touch, a huge iron-hand encased in a silken glove; but yet how stolidly dead to the pathos of the scene appeared to be the judges, the lawyers, the keepers, and all the posse of persons of the official class.

Mr. Smeuth, who conducted the prosecution in a manner reported by the county paper as "that urbane and gentlemanly *modus operandi* which distinguishes him," would doubtless go home to Creeper Villa, and sip his *post prandial* sherry with a serene consciousness that he had had a hard

day and was well through with it, his duty to his employer ably discharged, and his duty to himself not neglected; and he might perhaps afterwards draw to his knee his little son and curly-headed daughter, and read to them from a moral story book, with pathetic overflow of genuine humour, the paternal precept that charity begins at home; the while poor Barney was jolting in the prison van to Blankshire jail, and *his* family were sobbing in the lonely cottage on the Common with burning eyes and bleeding hearts!

The gamekeepers and official witnesses of that class ran hard for a verdict, like fox-hounds for blood! And who shall blame them? There was in their case no assumption of merciful consideration such as characterised the subtle eloquence of the gentle advocate; but daily bread—and meat!—is necessary to gamekeepers (and as I have since learnt, to policemen) and daily bread, which in their case is professional bread, depends upon professional skill; so that each contested trial becomes a struggle for existence, as to who shall go to the wall, the weak prisoner or the strong official: with small store set by what such official people would contemptuously style, “feelings, indeed!”

As for witnesses, in rural districts as in urban, there are some who are honest and truthful, others who are honest but mistaken; others again who are honest but more baneful than the dishonest through perverting power of prejudice; and there are also the dishonest; but in rural districts, especially, there is in the minds of all classes a pervading and over-ruling sense of what is due to great landed proprietors; the manifestations whereof are often grotesquely absurd, and even culpably wicked—insomuch

that those magnates of the land, were they aware of such proceedings, would shudder at the acts of their own people : for it is one of the penalties of great position to be served too zealously !

On the part of the defence the forensic eloquence of the Tribune-of-the-People proved deplorably weak ; there appeared to be a clog upon the frisky heels of his Pegasus, heavier even, so it seemed, than it need to have been from the inherent weakness of his case. There was, indeed, no defence ! Barney's peculiar habits fitted exactly to the suggestions of Mr. Smeuth ; and of witnesses there were none to facts and but few to character. Of the latter class, a few neighbours, inspired with genuine commiseration, did to the surprise of the majority stand up and testify for poor Barney, but, with stupid benevolence, in a deprecatory tone they expressed pity—I, alone, indignation !

And so at last the magistrates retired to consider their verdict. They were gone some time ; and, as it was afterwards whispered, the rector, the sad squire, and others, moved by the helpless position of the prisoner, and believing what I, as the principal witness on his behalf, had stated as to his love of wild creatures and ability as a field naturalist, and also the defendant's story that he struck the "cockney" in self-defence, positively argued for an acquittal. But when it came to a show of hands the rector righteously waiving his right of casting vote, and the numbers being otherwise equal, the great baron's son, the newly-fledged magistrate, in right of small landed property left him by a maternal aunt, ranged himself on the side of strict justice, and so carried a verdict of GUILTY, by a majority of one !



The Rector, who now that a verdict had been arrived at as he fondly believed by a kind of divine inspiration, felt it his duty to carry out the law—as, to do him justice, he would have done with Brutus-like fortitude had the “you Barney Bartrum, junior,” whom he condemned been replaced by his own son,—inflicted a penalty of so many pounds sterling with costs, or in default of payment thereof a certain number of weeks’ imprisonment in Blankshire jail, with hard labour. The second charge of assault was not gone into, but a nominal verdict of guilty was I believe recorded with remission of fine, but added costs. I offered to pay the money for Barney, but he knowing my resources were slender almost as his own, forbade it with a gesture by which I knew too well his resolve was irrevocable; and so he endured his hard labour.

Young Barney Bartrum, sometime after emerging from jail, emigrated to Australia, where, when I last heard about him, he had made a fortune, not by exercise of those excellent talents with which he was endowed, but by some lucky leap in the dark, the importation of a ship-load of straw bonnets, I believe,—leading on to greater successes; yet I doubt if ever, now that he has made his way, and got to be a colonial legislator, he spends happier days than he used to do when he kept a mental calendar of birds’ nests in that rural corner of East Anglia.

Lest it may be thought I am too much inclined to view the poor through rose-tinted spectacles, I may here mention a fact which came under my own immediate cognizance, proving in a very convincing manner the extreme improvidence of the poor. This very family of Bartrum were in

the habit at harvest-time of gleaning, as all their neighbours were, in those days when the old-fashioned custom of allowing the stray ears of plenty to fall into the lap of poverty had never been discountenanced. One harvest season, the roving industry of the numerous younger members of the family had been so successful, as gleaners, in the new cleared stubbles, that on the united sheaves being thrashed and winnowed a whole sack of wheat was the result; which being sent to the grist-mill was duly returned ground into coarse flour. East Anglia is distinguished as the "Land of Dumplings;" and this poor family proceeded in the usual manner to celebrate their bountiful harvest by a feast of dumplings, made from the sweet new coarse-ground flour. But whether their heads were turned by so small a gleam of plenty, or whether some unwonted visiting drove them so far from the beaten route of dull travail they became "*led will*," I cannot say; certain it is they ran wild in a ceaseless orgie of gluttony until the whole sack of flour was consumed in one week! I tasted some of the dumplings myself, and joined in the singing and dancing on one of the festive evenings; as I was also witness to the dull repentance of the ensuing fast!

Improvvidence is the vice of dependence. The household servant, knowing only one side of the active process of earning and spending, is commonly wasteful; so the poor, relieved from any care for the morrow, by the sordid assurance of pauper dole and the workhouse, never learn that frugal forethought which characterises the peasant proprietor. A pound scraped together in pence is sure to be taken care of. Could the lower classes in our rural districts be gradually, and on a safe basis, established as peasant

proprietors, not only would their social and moral condition be enhanced, but the real wealth and general prosperity of the kingdom would be materially increased.

The superstition known as "Led Will" is one, so far as I am aware, peculiar to East Anglia, and does not appear to have been garnered by any of our industrious literary gleaners in the field of folk-lore. I have heard of several manifestations of it, but can personally vouch for only one. On a dull night, in the fall of the year, when the stubbles had been all cleared, a wayfarer was plodding along from the village of B—h to the village of D—h, a distance of some four miles by the field paths, every yard of which the pedestrian knew perfectly. He was not particularly careful to keep to the footpath across the stubble fields, but on arriving at a large semi-enclosed space of pasture land where sheep were commonly fed, he mounted the stile and kept carefully to the narrow footpath, running alongside the hedge under the tall ash trees, so as to avoid the clammy herbage. The slender path was discernible as the lonely feet went plodding on, but distant objects were lost beneath the moonless sky, not densely dark but dim ; here were the black masses of the bordering trees, and there the gray forms of the sheep lying silent on the drowsy field : all else was indistinct. A brisk walk of ten minutes carried the traveller across the wide pasture-place, and on to the next stile ; or rather should have done so, for when he reached the accustomed spot no stile was there ! One would have thought a moment's intelligent search must have discovered the missing stile ; but a dull confusion suddenly took possession of the poor fellow's mind, he felt convinced he must have missed his way, and so that he had reached the

wrong part of the enclosure ; his *will*, in fact, abandoned its proper functions, and he felt himself in a confused state of semi-consciousness, as if being *led* astray by some mysterious influence. Down the long transverse fence he now plodded, feeling with his stick for the stile, until he reached the opposite side of the plain, lying low and shrouded in deep shadow, through which, at that time of night, to pass was a horror ; but it must be done, as things were all awry and the missing stile would surely be found in the yonder fence. So on again he trudged, but no luck attended his groping search ; and the accustomed path under the ash trees was again reached, and tramped over again, additional care being taken by stooping low not to miss it even by the slightest space, but lo ! where it should have led straight up to the step and the stile, again no stile was found !—only some dead thorns, as if the stile had been removed, and the gap roughly repaired. This was serious, the dull confusion of mind was growing worse, and the will more powerless ! What better to do than plod the same weary round again ? Agreed ! invisible Imp of the night. And so the circuit was once more completed, with the same bootless result ; and, alack ! a third time ; so that the weary night was almost worn away, and the dull gray streak of morn's opening eyelid began to show faint in the East. Standing, for the last time, perspiring and exhausted, in the weary corner where the stile ought to be, beneath the moping ash tree which now began to whisper and stir in the chill creeping air, the victim of Led-Will bethought him to stoop down, so as to bring the horizon within the field of light, if haply he might by that means discover the distant tower of D—h church, when,

confusion!—staring him full in the face, there was the stile! There, too, was the familiar step; and as he placed his foot upon the board he noticed a faggot of dead thorns which had been recently thrust into a hole in the fence, close adjoining the stile; and so he must in the weary rounds of that almost night-long dawdling pilgrimage have been within a yard of the stile thrice without discovering it!

This is what the peasantry call “Led-Will,” and they believe the perverse confusion of mind to be caused by some tricky spirit.

Almost equally omitted from literary record is an ancient sport, called “Camp,” once I believe practised commonly in East Anglia, but now quite extinct; the writer possibly having taken a part in one (the only one he ever saw) which was the last of its kind.

An elderly man, with a torso like Herakles but the head of Antinous, only shaven in the old Norman fashion, told me about the sport of “camping”—or as he pronounced it “*kemping*” in his younger days. Then parish used to contend with parish, and the sports might last for a week: the method being to choose equal sides, the men of one district against the men of another, and so having marked distant goals, to meet in the centre and strive which party should drive the other home. John L——e, his name that of a noted philosopher, had thrown a famous wrestler some four stone heavier than himself, and beaten Gypsy Cooper at a Camp held near the Norfolk Broads; “rough camping” being played on that occasion.

“Rough camping” consisted of running, wrestling, and boxing; in “smooth camping,” boxing was barred. Honest

John's peculiar method, known to the initiated as "horsing," may be understood from the following elegant recipe :— Face your antagonist, as if for wrestling or boxing, keeping your eye fixed on your man, and so play light and cool watching your opportunity, which, if you have courage to endure and patience to wait, will be sure to come,—then, instantly duck your head, like lightning, between his legs, clutch his ankles as in a vice, and so, with some of his weight lively upon your shoulders some on your arms, spring up, and hurl him headlong over your back ! N.B.—If you can do this with a twelve-stone man, you are strong ; if with sixteen stone, very strong ; but do not attempt it, even with ten stone, if your lumbar muscles are weak : for in that case, even should you escape the awkward counter (which is given thus ————/), you may chance to catch a very painful "rick in the back."

Fore-armed with some such oracular instructions as these, I, a curious stranger, attended a "Camp," holden on the high common at D——h on a Sunday afternoon. A numerous side was selected by each party, when I was informed to my surprise and chagrin that it would be looked upon as cowardly for any one able-bodied to stand out, and that I was chosen "in" ; at the same time I was assured (falsely as the event proved) by a brawny blacksmith's apprentice, captain of the side opposed to that which had had the ill-luck to pick me, that "*smooth* camp" only would be played. So, consenting, I was posted, as a genteel stripling, in an easy place not likely to be attacked, a slight depression in the ground, where I was to lie *perdue* to be prepared to do my best, something on the "up guards and at them" principle, should any unlooked for emergency

roll the tide of battle my way. The contest raged between the more active forces long and doubtfully, when from my cool retreat I noticed the combat surging in my direction, and that the felon blacksmith's-apprentice, slipping the *mêlée*, was running straight towards me, chuckling, doubtless, over an anticipated easy conquest, whereby a clear opening could be made for his followers to rush over my prostrate form and gain a goal. But victory is not always to the strong, nor even to the astute, as the false blacksmith found that day. There was no time for hesitation; so rising hurriedly, I prepared for defence; but in doing so, unwittingly I presented to my antagonist a tempting opening; instantly he ducked—traitor to the rules of "smooth camp"—seeking to mount me on the rough Horse, but I stepped back nimbly, and administered the awkward Counter!—and so it came about much to his mortification and surprise, the felon captain bit the grass.

From that hour I was free of the Guild of Campers; but happily I never again had occasion to put in practice the precepts of the elderly man who had the name of a moral philosopher, but the torso of Herakles, and the head of the young Antinous.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE WOODLAND.

**T**READ lightly as passing between the giant bōls, upholding like columns the leafy cornice of lofty portico, we enter this ancient, vast, and solemn Temple; and as you step reverently across the silent floor, crushing the withered leaves dead relics of last year's votive offerings, be careful you do not rudely invade that sacred circle of light, now at high noon warmed to fervent heat by the scorching sunbeams, or you may have bitter cause to rue the impious intrusion! Start not so convulsively, nor glare at me with such a searching frown!—it is for your own sake alone I speak, and not in dread of Deities, but of Vipers. Yet well it were if some of the old world worship of the sacred groves remained purified and hallowed. What an eternity of adoration these three symbolise—the tree, the serpent, and the sun! But of the latter two our prudish modern philosophy has learnt to take a severely accurate estimate, and to hold them—especially the snake—in light esteem as objects of veneration; yet even now, with all our ruthless schooling, his breast contains a heart not bold but torpid who can stalk unmoved into the dim arcanum of this ever whispering forest!



Some of the lithe creatures you see gliding silently away at your approach, disturbed by the lightest footfall, are snakes (*Natrix torquata*) and are perfectly innocuous; not so the viper (*Vipera communis*), his bite, though never or very rarely fatal to large creatures, is shrewdly venomous and contaminates a man's blood to the verge of mortal peril; but both snakes and vipers are timid creatures, anxious to retreat from human gaze, and glad to get away if allowed to do so; while moreover the venomous English serpent is rare, and out of twenty reptiles that may be seen on the southern border of this wood throughout the lapse of a summer only one shall be a "stinging adder." Waterton, who after the manner of his day was in the habit of scoffing at those who disagreed with him, makes an amusing mistake when in his sententious way, alluding to our own snakes here in England, he states, "*One species which I designate under the name of adder is a harmless little fellow,*" the plain fact being that "adder" applied as the name of a non-poisonous snake is a misnomer. When opportunity is afforded for it to be noticed, the pretty yellow ring or double blotch with a black margin at the nape of the neck is a distinctive mark and sure sign of the harmless snake, though that is not always observable by the unskilful or unwary, for the head and neck are the first parts of the reptile's body to instantly disappear into covert upon any alarm; yet though not so glaringly obvious there is a more constantly available and equally sure means of distinguishing the harmless ringed snake from the venomous adder which can be learnt upon almost the first trial—the general colour of the snake's back is softer than that of the viper's, the gray being tinged with a

smooth olive green tint, as any one may prove by quietly comparing a harmless dead specimen of each kind ; but the most hasty glance, forewarned, as the creature slinks swiftly through the undergrowth will detect if there be a rugose horrent look about the scales ; if so, beware ! touch not ! for there are poison fangs in the creature's jaws to be used as a last resource should you rashly cut off her line of retreat. This roughness of the scales on the adder's back is more apparent than real, and is due to certain minute specks or marks of a black colour that are never absent from any specimen ; though the row or chain of dark spots along the course of the spine so clearly shown in most pictorial illustrations is by no means so obviously apparent on the back of every living viper.

It is interesting to note the way in which a snake escapes from dreaded view of an intruder, there is no hurry, but intense rapidity ; if there be fear, as doubtless there is, on the poor reptile's part, it is admirably controlled. Unlike the scuttling flight of a rabbit or the frantic flapping of a startled bird, the snake moves with deliberate swiftness, choosing instantly his line of retreat and departing upon it with the silent rapidity of thought ; there is no bustle, no sliddering back again into view ; where but a moment before you thought you observed some lazy coils with a quiet little head and a tiny gleaming eye in the midst of them, with occasionally an oily black forked-tongue darting cunningly in and out the ha'f-closed jaws, there is now only to be seen a dark crevice and the tremulous gleam of a taper tail rapidly drawn in after a head and body already out of sight.

Many people are possessed by an instinctive fear of

crawling reptiles which can but seldom be overcome by the exercise of reason ; while occasionally we meet with persons endowed with a singular natural faculty of handling such creatures, not only with impunity but with apparent pleasure. I knew a Mr. D—— in Norfolk—a gentleman who wrecked his peace of mind and spent a modest fortune in endeavouring to perfect what has never yet been accomplished, a true locomotive steam-plough—who was a true snake charmer. If a friend met him on a field-path, it was no uncommon thing for him to produce two or three writhing snakes from the ample pockets of his shooting jacket for the purpose of offering them jocularly as a gift : invariably declined, and not always with thanks. I have seen the lissome creatures gliding all over his body apparently as much delighted with his kind attentions as he with their company ; the secret of it being warmth perhaps, for it was next his skin they were accustomed to crawl, though I am not prepared to disbelieve in some occult power of sympathy or attraction, the special endowment of only a few ; certainly it was strange to see a snake's shining head and quivering tongue come sliding down his wrist from under the sleeve or popping up furtively between the starched folds of a spotless shirt-collar ! I never myself attained to any degree of skill or daring with snakes, but by dint of preserving some of the harmless sort for several years about the rockwork in a garden, I conquered a real liking for them, and gained a quiet unconcerned manner of approaching them, which, occasionally, would be rewarded by so much confidence on their part as to enable one to observe closely the beauty of their contour and colouring, and the gracefulness of their quieter move-

ments ; yet if the bright little eye of the snake be watched on any such occasion it will be seen to be never " off " you, and on the very slightest awkward motion of your limbs or body, which his keen susceptibility instantly detects and suspects, your snake friend disappears with startling rapidity.

The idea that the snake casts its slough " wrong side outward, and as drawn off backward like a stocking or woman's glove," is almost too absurd for refutation, and as White adds when hazarding the conjecture, "*it would be a most entertaining sight could a person be an eye witness to such a feat.*" The old skin when the time has come for casting it sits loosely upon the snake's body, and if any fair lady will try the experiment of removing a *loose* fitting glove, carefully debarring herself from the convenient use of prehensile thumb and finger of the hand disengaged, so as to be on an equality in this respect with the poor reptile, the impossibility of performing the operation by the reverse method (convenient with a tight-fitting glove and the free use of the disengaged hand) and the comparative ease with which it can be accomplished in the direct method by rubbing or drawing against chair or table will be at once demonstrated. In truth, the snake, having first put on under its old coat a new tight-fitting dress, crawls bodily out of its old loose surtout, being aided in the performance of this curious operation by the friction of rough herbage or other conveniently placed inert substances between which it purposely draws its body ; the inert resistance of twig or stone performing after a fashion, though not of course so deftly, the valet's friendly office when he seizes the cuff of your loose-fitting over-coat

while you disengage your arm from its sleeve. Any other mode of getting out of its skin than this direct method is to a snake, or to any creature with a snake's conformation, a mechanical impossibility; and while there may be, and I believe there often is, some rough reversal about the cast-off head-piece caused by the creature's first rubbing or pushing motion against its clumsy "valet," a neat and complete turning *inside out* is a feat the poor snake could never accomplish, and one far more worthy to be done by the chief acrobat to Prester John. The finest snake's slough I ever saw—nearly four feet long, perfect in every plate and scale, and without any even the slightest rent or flaw—I found in the rockwork where the snakes dwelt, and the delicate integument at about a hand's breadth from its taper caudal extremity was left lying significantly embedded between two projecting closely overlapping ledges of stone, where through the narrow interspace it was evident the sagacious creature had drawn its body, and so by the aid of a friendly grip had deftly divested itself of its old worn-out coat, and that unmistakably by the direct method of creeping straight out of it.

Our nomenclature distinguishing the various kinds of woodland is voluminous and racy of the soil, the growth of many centuries, springing from roots in various languages (chiefly northern) and blooming ever verdant with leafy memories of old sports, customs, and polity; the bare names, some of them, conveying an innate charm and breath of sylvan poetry. The term "Woodlands" is defined by an old author as meaning "*places where there are many woods in close countries,*" and may be deemed to include roughly every other sylvan name. "Wold," "Wald," or

"Weald," anciently meaning *wood*, now applies to rolling upland country, almost wholly bare of any other growth than shortest grass. It may be something more perhaps than a guess at truth if we conclude that the whole area of this country, clear of the mountains of Caledonia and Wales, was in the earliest days long prior to the Roman invasion, composed of two sorts of land only—*Weald* and *Fen*—the higher grounds clothed mostly with trees, the lower grounds submerged mostly with water. "Forest" has come to mean a vast wood—a wide area closely overgrown by tall trees—especially as applied to the woods of foreign countries—the pine forests of Norway and North America, or the dense dark jungle forests of tropical Africa, for instance; but in its native English meaning it applies rather to wood not so dense, but diversified with open spaces and with every species of undergrowth, spread out over an extensive area and suitable for the harbour and for the hunting of wild beasts. It has a further and more restricted meaning, redolent of old Norman-French law, as a place not enclosed, only fenced about by stern legal enactments, partly wooded and partly cleared, privileged to hold all kinds of game, and wherein the King alone might hunt and take his pleasure; no subject (except perchance a bold outlaw) daring to sport therein without royal leave and licence. "Grove" also has an old and new meaning; formerly a *grove* was an avenue (whence groove) cut in a forest for purposes of venerie, now it applies rather to a little wood of taller trees without underwood, and is so used in Epping Forest at this day. "Chace," a name which lingers still in many parts of rural England after the original use has long been abandoned, is an open hunting-

ground which, though sometimes as large almost as a royal forest, might be possessed by a subject; while "Park" is a smaller place for deer and game, always enclosed, and, as such, private property. "Coppice" or "Copse," a small wood consisting entirely of lesser growth, such as hazel or ash, fit for sticks and poles and sundry other rustic appliances, and cut regularly at certain seasons of the year. "Thicket," a dense growth, with bushes and brambles, fit covert or harbour for wild beasts—as "Cover" in hunting phrase is now for fox or hare.

"Den" or "Dene," "Ley," "Hurst," "Hay," are names that to the ears of the old Anglo-Saxon herdsmen and the old Anglo-Norman hunter conveyed distinctive meanings, and which still remain to us to confer an added charm upon our woodland districts: now so many of them cleared. "Plantation" is the formal name conferred upon our modern artificial "plantings" of trees;—which bear about them too often the mark of the beast as being set out arbitrarily with a sordid view to bare money-profit alone. These plantations consist in general of serried rows of firs, quickly grown, to be as quickly felled, interspersed with occasional trees of nobler growth; but when they are composed of coniferæ only, as too often they are, they bear upon them a self-imposed stamp of ugliness, such as patently condemns all artificial things that violate rudely the fair order of nature. If our surveyors and agents would but learn the loving wisdom of our ancestors the Anglo-Saxon husbandmen, they might then plant and enclose in a way to aid and develop natural beauty, while best securing for our farm-lands the highest pitch of utility. We ought surely at the present day to know something of

the kindly chemistry of nature ; but alas ! how steadily it has been and is ignored by those having in their hands the management and cultivation of land. There are thousands of farms in this kingdom whereon for the sake of the ninety and nine good acres the one hundredth bad one is farmed at a loss ! The tenant-farmer pays rent to his landlord for this bad acre—plenty good enough be it noted for the landlord to take in hand and grow fir-trees upon—pays outgoings, taxes, tithes upon it, spends his time and money cultivating it in obedience to the wooden covenants of a musty lease, and either frets and loses temper over it, or plods on blindly in utter ignorance of it, or moodily sets down the gross cost of it and dividing the sum by ninety-nine adds the result as an unthankful increment in excess of the proper rent per acre on the good land ; while possibly on the same estate there may be acres of good land kept in hand by the landlord, which he might otherwise let at a good rent to the tenant, growing spindly spruce and larch where heavy crops of wheat might grow or permanent growth of luxuriant grasses flourish. When arable land and pasture land and plantations are wisely laid out and intermingled, instead of as now without any more real design (whatever there may be of superficial pretence and flourish) than goes to make the random cross-lines upon a child's slate, then there may result a pleasanter adjustment of burdens upon the shoulders of the various members of agricultural communities, an increase of the people's food and of the national wealth, and moreover such a pleasant pastoral landscape as may charm the eye (while in addition satisfying the mind) with a beauty akin to the beauty of the wild broken Wood-land of our fore-fathers' days.



The broken Wood-land is joyous to wander in ; but the dense Forest is awful. In the one the sparsely scattered groves of tall trees stand in open glades of bracken and green underwood, where the free air is inspired by the light and warmth of the sun, and every delicate glancing spray laughs in his beams. In the other, "the boundless contiguity of shade" invests every object with a sombre gloom; a dull twilight reigns, through which the clear light of heaven never pierces, nor the twinkling eye of any star; the earth is dark and bare, save of the huge gray ghost-like stems keeping watch and ward in the land of Silence, and here and there pallid weeds, lying prone like imprisoned maidens sighing in vain for the coming of the Prince of Day! Some of the weird power of the Forest may be due to the direct physical action of lowered temperature. As the tired wanderer from the outer world of lustrous heat penetrates with silent foot-fall into the dim realm of verdurous shade, he hears the mournful winds gathering under the lofty unbroken canopy of boughs, and shudders as he feels their invisible pinions descend winnowing the chill air all round him; it is at that moment the warm current in his veins is checked, and he bows beneath a depressing influence which the body as instantly confesses as does the captive mind the subjugating power of gleaming shade, uncertain space, and whispering silence.

The impenetrable blackness of night (except to a mind broken down, or utterly childish and unfortified) is less awful than twilight gloom; it is the half-light which, coming in uncertain shape, pricks the prurient imagination with vague suggestion. Hence the greatest masters of tragic art, from Æschylus to Dante and our own Shake-

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speare, have produced their grandest effects by the aid of gloomy and uncertain rather than of positive darkness ; it is the lesser artist who strives to impress by the brutal use of absolute pitch. Bearing in mind this nice distinction between the kind of diversified forest which may be characterised as wood-land, and that denser, wider, more uniform growth of trees which may be regarded as forest proper, it may be accepted as proved that the horrent pine forests of the North have had as much influence on the wild character of Scandinavian mythology, as the gloom of illimitable tropical forests now have in oppressing the mind of the African savage with the dark terrors of Fetichism ; while in our own country the genial colouring of the superstitions and traditions connected with our own sylvan scenery may be due to the fact that it partakes rather of the Wood-land than of the Forest character.

The native woods of England consist chiefly of oaks with hazel under-growth, and both these trees develop chemical properties which if undisturbed by cultivation apply a natural corrective to too luxurious growth. Could we trace back with certainty their history far enough, it would be found that our ancient forests have not only undergone mutations from wooded land to bare waste, and *vice versa* ; but also that they have maintained a kind of shifting existence, the oak grove of one age becoming the comparatively bare coppice or ferny brake of a succeeding one :— and here we are brought face to face with some admirable compensations in nature's system of working.

It is a well-known property of trees to collect the rarified vapour from the air and to condense it into moisture in certain states of the atmosphere, oftentimes so abundantly

that it is discharged from their leafy boughs in a dripping shower when all elsewhere is apparently dry, and this extraordinary pluvial dower added to the ordinary rainfall produces such a state of humidity in the vicinity of trees, that not only is the wood-land air filled with excess of moisture, but the wood-land soil is saturated with it also and to such a degree that in long course of time small stagnant pools come to be formed in hollows and between bossy root-stools, and quaking bogs grow in soft earthy pockets beneath the thick pavement of dead leaves, where the imprisoned drainage-water oftentimes finding no natural outlet accumulates in slowly increasing stores. Here in these terraqueous vats Dame Nature carries on the manufacture of ink on a befittingly grand scale, using sphagnum and peat soil to give consistency to the liquid, and adding at every fall from nodding oaks of gall-nuts and acorns, at every harvest of fractured oaken boughs, and at every wind-strewn shower of green-husked hazel nuts, plentiful charges of gallic, tannic, acetic acid, whatever pungent juice may be necessary for staining the great stores of ink to a proper blackness ; so that any belated hind or reckless hunter plunging therein may dye his face withal. But the effect on the forest trees of this strange chemistry is gradually to destroy them—the delicate fibrous roots, surfeited more and more with excess of sour astringent fluid, shrink into a state of disease and rottenness, the process of growth is gradually arrested, and the trees at length fall victims to a self-generated fatal decay.

But while the rain and the pyroligneous acid, and all the other acids and chemicals in Nature's great ink vaults, are gradually killing the old oak trees and the old nut bushes

with the brewing of their own sap, there are other agencies at work planting young ones ; for the rooks and the squirrels here and there, from overloaded pouch or skittish paw, dropping ripe nuts and acorns upon kindly ground, and the hurtling winds, making regretful amends for wreck and mischief they may have done, blowing some seed hither and some thither away into the open lawns, are preparing pleasant nurseries where vigorous saplings shall spring up, from the ripe loam and the lush covert of shielding grass, and grow to be great trees in their turn, when their ancestors have mouldered away into rotten "touch-wood."

"Touchwood" dies hard, for even in its last throes of decay a living spirit creeps out of it—a perfectly harmless sprite, though he has stricken terror into thousands of foolish human hearts. He may be seen by the friendly aid of darkness, imprisoned in the smooth dry back of a gate which the carpenter has long since planed and fashioned, reminding one of the great Eastern jinn shut down by the poor fisherman in an earthen pot ; and if a small portion of the narrow streak seen gleaming pearly white in the dead of the night be cut off with a pen-knife, it will be found to be on examination by the light of the next morning nothing more remarkable than a bit of soft and harmless *sap-wood* of spruce fir, exposing only the roguery of John Carpenter, who should have used heart of oak or at least sound larch. This gleaming spirit has several proper names and more fictitious ones, for the superstitious, the timid, and the credulous have often dubbed him ghost and other dreadful names : his plain chemical cognomen being, however, Phosphorus. I have met with Phosphorus under several disguises, and occasionally under circumstances

when the lambent gleam of his lantern in one's face caused an involuntary shudder; but I never but once met him walking cheerfully abroad, and then I was not in the least alarmed, scarcely even surprised: perhaps I ought to add, *until he was gone*, for then indeed;—but let me relate the story.

It is in those manufacturing ink vaults we have just been speaking of that Phosphorus is most busy; he is a kind of working foreman in Dame Nature's factory, and having laboured hard all day in the lonely woods, making a fuss and a ferment among the dark gleaming juices and the rotten tree stumps, and having by that means perhaps over-excited himself, he loves when his work is done to take his ease as a jolly gas-man should, and to expand his soul upon the free night-air, for which purpose forthwith arraying himself, according to his fancy, in any one of various luminous disguises to be found in his well furnished wardrobe, he makes his escape, with a wild gurgling leap and bubbling noise of impish glee, from those sweating solitudes, and so goes wandering forth keeping silence through the peopled realms of night, but seeking by the aid of his flickering lamp the casual acquaintance of be-lated travellers. When Phosphorus goes jogging along as a yawning carter goes, at the sleepy hour of night crossing the silent inn yard with his great gleaming stable lanthorn swinging pendant from his fist, constrained to visit his munching team preparatory to an early start, the rustics call him "Jack-o'-lantern," and the trembling way-farers "Will-o'-the-wisp."

Now as this decayed gentleman, who was of bright

repute in this fair island in the days of good Queen Bess, and who even in times so much later as the earlier years of his gracious Majesty King George the third still retained some faint scintillations of his pristine splendour, is gradually being improved off the face of the earth, even so that scoffers may soon come to maintain there never was such a personage as Jack-o'-lantern, *alias* Will-o'-th'-wisp—call him which you will—I think it right to relate how he was once met with bodily in the flesh, or, saving his possible presence, one ought, perhaps, more correctly to say in the spirit. Some trivial call of business or of pleasure, most probably the latter, had lured a youth away from home ; it was in the days when he was “young and curly,” and the hours sped by on rosy wing until the humming tongue of the great church clock told all the drowsy Market-town that it was midnight—then he arose to depart. He was alone, on foot, and seven weary miles had to be trudged before he could hope to win home and bed. Under such circumstances as these, even the most cheerful natures are apt to feel a touch of sadness. About midway on the road—at no part of it a cheerful one—a lonely Common had to be traversed, a melancholy frowsy place, which stretched its devious course along the side of the highway, here narrowing to a strip of level waste, and anon wandering off to uncertain distances over a barren surface, roughened in places by ugly knots of dusty furze, or by an occasional patch of wiry ling withering on the sapless breast of desolation. All these dreary features were familiar enough by broad daylight, but now nothing appeared distinct ; it was dark by a dull negation of everything bright, no moon, no stars, no kind of light, save on the far away edge of Night's sooty cloak a

pallid fringe, drawn across which pale background the strained eye could discover looming somewhere in mid-distance a dark clump of trees, from out the obscurity of whose motionless shadow low down a faint reflection gleamed as of evil light upon joyless water. The youth had that day been listening to the strains of one of the sweetest organs played by the most charming player in one of the grandest churches in East Anglia, and the rippling notes of an overture rather secular than sacred were tinkling through his brain, when the sudden noise made by some homeless creature, stumbling away from approaching footsteps into outer darkness, aroused him to sudden consciousness of the fact that he was upon Se'mere Common, and fast approaching the little garden wicket of the lone farm house where "the old Scotchman" lived. Though commons are places generally to be recognised with satisfaction, as being a kind of material evidence of the respect paid to the rights of a free people, and rare as they are becoming in England—the greater shame upon those whose senseless greed blinds them to any good save in adding field to field, and the greater pity for the poor man the sole of whose foot may not rest freely anywhere save on the dusty highway—yet it must candidly be confessed the youth derived no pleasure at this juncture from beholding the melancholy face of Se'mere Green. Only a few weeks before, "the old Scotchman," a tall taciturn solitary man, big-boned and sinewy as an ox, who came wandering hither from far Argyle, why or wherefore none ever knew, and took this graceless farm no one else cared to occupy, had been robbed by some villains, doubtless tempted to the adventure by the common rumour that "the Scotchman"

kept his money (little enough in fact, but richly augmented by report as such frugal hoards always are) in a chest beneath his bed : "robbed" that is if he can be deemed to be robbed upon whom only the barren attempt is made. No living soul save the stalwart Scotchman himself slept in the lone farm-house, and the burglars, three in number, contrived to steal in at dead of night upon his deep slumber into his very bed-room undetected, the only warning the cowards vouchsafed to him, and to which they doubtless intended there should be no response or but a feeble one, being a dreadful blow of the kitchen poker full across his unconscious forehead. But in committing their desperate fortunes to this dastardly act of violence, the burglars reckoned without their host, and certainly miscalculated the thickness of the Gaelic skull ; the big Scotchman only sneezed, as did the famous giant King of Cornwall under similar circumstances, (so history repeats itself!) and straightway he arose and fell upon those three burglars, and so grievously entreated them, they were only too glad to be allowed to escape with their miserable lives, leaving behind them, however, a torn garment, which led to their ultimate capture, trial, and heavy sentence.

With this cheerful story fresh upon his mind the youth was pushing more briskly on, when he observed upon the further confines of the common a bright light, moving steadily along at a fair walking pace, with just such a motion as would be imparted to the light of a lantern by a person in search of something he had lost. It instantly flashed across his mind that it would be some farmer going to visit his stock, or possibly a man in search of the belated beast he had heard blundering round the pond, and yet he thought it so



strange at such a time of night and in such an out-o'-the-way place for an honest man to be jogging round with a lantern that he paused involuntarily, and felt come upon him a queer kind of impulse to bawl out and ask what was the matter, an impulse, however, he immediately conquered, and then felt as strange a determination to keep silence, for he observed the flickering light had suddenly altered its course, and was now coming straight across the common, bearing down full upon him. The light now appeared larger, brighter, and in its motion more steady, not unlike the unexpected gleam of a chaise with lamps aglow, which you have a difficulty in making your horse meet coming end-on towards you at night upon a solitary road, but in this strange light, the coming of which was now awaited, there was no nucleus nor any rays, only a moving space of bluish-white light. On it came, and in an instant was within a few yards of him ; he saw distinctly, within the circle of its influence, the half-withered yellow blossoms on the dusty furze bushes, the pallid blades of grass upon the ground, and the blinking sprays of heather ; and then, as it passed him on his right, so near he could almost have thrust his hand into it, he knew it was useless to address it, for there was no man in it, no lanthorn, nor any human agency, only a body of pale light moving along swiftly, as if with invisible feet, upon the ground, and in dead silence ! When the thing had passed him he resumed his journey, and having mastered a mile of road in ten minutes, stopped and lighted a cigar—a sedative much needed.

Night is not a bad time for pedestrian exertion when your chief object is to cover a distance of ground ; nor indeed is there lacking under such circumstances a peculiar

sense of enjoyment akin to the stimulus so fascinating to some natures afforded by the prospect of indefinite adventure, and which perhaps far more than the mere hope of gain or love of idleness is the real secret why the poacher's precarious trade is so desperately enticing to men otherwise honestly disposed, but whose ardent temperament instinctively craves a reaction after work-a-day hours passed in soulless drudgery. But the pedestrian should carefully avoid long continued walking at night if conscious of any sense of weariness arising from insufficient sleep, or if feeling somewhat worried and upset by reason of taking sleep at an unusual time, for if such be the case it is far better for him to turn in and soothe the slight mental irritation by dawdling over a quiet pipe rather than to persist in any stern resolve to "walk it off," unless he be determined or compelled to use himself up; but when the frame takes kindly to it, the certainty of securing cool air and fresh where the country is open (though not so invigorating as the purer air of the morning) a cool road moistened perhaps by gentle dews, and freedom from interruption is not to be despised; and under such advantageous conditions a young vigorous pedestrian may safely cover many miles of ground between sunset and midnight. Night walking should not however be continued even on emergency much after midnight, though there are two seasons when youth might be excused for longer vigils—first, on dry frosty nights of late autumn before the rains have soddened the earth, when the broad full moon shows all the landscape and the great diamond stars gleam aloft, the keen air being then so exhilarating; and secondly, on warm midsummer nights, when the sheeny radiance of

melting earth and sky entrance the imagination with a witchery no other hours possess: but at these softer moments *sauntering* is perhaps preferable to brisk walking.

Heaven help the poor wretches who with wan faces and feeble frames have to walk along dusty highways under a heavy load and a blazing sun; there is scarcely a spot now in merry England where such folk may venture to rest in cool shade, or where their burning feet may drag along the juicy turf. I noticed the other day a tramp plodding with broad horny soles through such a bit of turf, his toes turned inward after the manner of all shoeless men, giving the steps a stealthy air. "Tarquin's ravishing stride" might best be performed after this manner, as any tragedian may soon prove by experiment. A common used to be an adjunct to almost every village, and some bit of open green was to be met with beside almost every highway, but now all such places are rigidly enclosed; and of all our forests but two of the first magnitude—Epping Forest and the New Forest—retain a semblance of their pristine condition, while many larger forests and numberless smaller ones have been improved quite off the face of the earth—in all which places be it remembered the poor as well as the rich had rights and privileges.

Two little brooklets rise in a fair corner of a western county, possibly—for who shall tell?—from the same fruitful womb mother of springs, below the fresh green turf, and springing up to light and life so close together their tinkling voices may almost interchange a blithe good-bye, run off, one north the other south, each a separate way. The northern stream, shallow, quick, glancing on over chalk and pebbles, home of the leaping speckled trout,

pursues its northward course, then bends eastward, still in its broader volume rushing bright and clear, and finally turns south with deeper sedater flow, hearing at last the grave whisper of the sea ; the southern stream, losing quickly the mirth and ripple of its childhood, falls into sad places and humid flats, through which with devious course and musing depths of silent thought it slowly wanders south, then eastward bends, feeding within its breast by beds of mournful reeds the insatiate pike, until as it hears, answering with sighs, the grave whisper of the sea, lo ! the gay brother and the toil-worn one advance to meet each other, and so with clasped hands growing sad and old together they swale softly down one easy course into the sea.

Within this natural boundary, so admirably defined by the two streams, the whole vast space of country, some hundreds of square miles in extent, was once a Chace or Forest, over which the forest rights of noble or royal owner were maintained, not without frequent disputes, for many centuries ; and just in the heart of the greater space lay the more densely wooded and more strictly preserved "Inner bounds," the northern edge of which, it is interesting to note, is coincident throughout the whole of its devious course exactly with the county boundary between Dorset and Wilts. Also how, avoiding the ancient marshy district unfit for forest in the south-east angle toward the junction of the two rivers, the boundary of the chace follows partly the course of a branch stream and partly a line coincident with a more modern road, and then a line again coincident with a county boundary, that between Hants and Wilts. But towards the north-east end of the inner bounds there

is a still more remarkable proof of the persistent concurrence through the earlier ages of marches and boundaries, for there Grimsdike and Bockerley Ditch coincide, or nearly so, with the lines of a county boundary, the boundary of the Inner chace, and a road. From these suggestive facts we may deduce the safe conclusion that there ever was, while man followed his natural instincts to select for himself upon the earth a suitable dwelling-place, a persistent principle underlying the choice of boundary lines, and preceding in the order of time the military necessity of defending them; although undoubtedly the military barrier would sometimes for strategic reasons be in advance of and beyond the limit of the coveted soil. The march of the Roman alone, of all the old races in Britain, was straight from distant point to point; proving—he the while unconscious of it—that his mission was not to inhabit but to subjugate: and thus the track of his armed heel, striding proudly along the arrowy line of solid causeway indicated not so much his stern supremacy as it prefigured his ultimate weakness and his sure decay.

Our latest refinement in the art of demarcation is the setting out of States' boundaries by parallels of latitude and longitude, which, neither having nor seeking to have affinity with any natural feature lying around, and being but an airy figment of man's brain enabling his finite faculties so far as may be to grasp the infinite, reminds us, in this connexion, of those ultra-scientific tailors of Laputa who took the measure of a customer's coat while standing afar off with a sextant.

There is a glimmering inner meaning possessed by the old Anglo-Saxon word "grim" (primarily signifying boundary) as of a man's face scowling above the agger; as if one might imagine the various Grimsdikes wrinkling their plains had come to be associated in the minds of Britons and Belgæ with the frowning brows peering over them at the prowling foe below.

Within the ancient area of this picturesque Chace, stretching wide from limiting river to river, examples are contained of every kind of "forest" and "waste" land; and here also may be seen the tell-tale footprints of every family of the human race that ever roamed the southern portion of our island. Viewing this wide campaign—with here in bold relief an ancient hamlet or a modern farm, and yonder in the blue distance a Celtic barrow or a Roman camp—the mind insensibly is led to wander back through the long course of all the centuries until lost in the enchanted realms of prehistoric mist. To examine with adequate fulness in all their complex relationships even a tithe of the wonders crowding around us with embarrassing richness in this storied region—now only bucolic to the general, but still a heaven of faëry to the poet—is a theme might tax to the utmost the cultivated powers of some myriad-minded man, and which mocks our feebler grasp as do the pregnant suggestions of some glorious vision doomed to fade into unfruitful shadows. But whether it be the fading past or the obscure future which eludes our analysis, the common fields bordering our daily path invite us to easier toils.

This bold bluff, the extreme north-western spur of the

great table land, overlooking the Wiltshire vale as a headland overlooks the sea, at whose foot the new-born bright Sem-water ripples its northern course, once marked the extreme western limit of the Chace's wide "outer bounds," and still retains in spite of shearing enclosures its wild pristine beauty. The soil hereabouts is a poor sandy gravel, held by the wise tolerance of olden agriculture safe from any intrusion of the plough, and even by the more insensate greed of a later system only partially disturbed; but though barren in the narrowest agrarian sense there is even here a natural fruitfulness it is good to understand. The wild vegetation clothing virgin soil is a plain index of its quality and contents—a simple volume ever open if men would be content humbly to read it. For instance, here on Hart Hill amid the tangled herbage and brushwood there is a dense growth of thorny sloe (*Prunus spinosa*) but not a single white-thorn; while on the ancient waste called "Westwood," near a minster-crowned Yorkshire town, where well-defended peoples' common rights have resisted enclosure, there is scarcely any other growth than bushy clumps of common white-thorn upon undulating sward of close-cropped grass. The name Hart Hill—redolent of an illusive savour of hunter's fare—bears no allusion to the antlered deer, but is derived from the abundant growth of the common bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), whose small heart-shaped and dark heart-coloured berries creep obscure among the moist mosses on crawling stem, hard and angular as ill-drawn wire. These berries fall a coveted prize to poor children, who gather at the same time health and some juicy addition to the dry monotony of cottage fare. Hither also comes the frugal owner of patient

donkey or diminutive dry-ribbed horse to cut furze, when in the season its spikes are soft and young, to serve as provender for his toiling beast: the Lord of the Manor being one of the ancient faith, which among other stiff-necked superstitions appears to cherish a mild distrust of Enclosure Commissioners and Poor-Law Boards. Here too, for those who reap the harvest of poverty, there is reaping in yellow autumn of withered bracken (*Pteris aquilina*) or "Vörn," as the western rustic calls it, to serve as luxurious bedding for "the pig," and all through the summer stray harvest of nettles to boil up for his food, or to serve as fattening mixture combined with a little barley meal for the one brood of young ducks;—these phenomenal callow creatures, pride of all the quaint little hamlet, reared with painful solicitude in this ancient cōte upon the worn brick hearth by this poor solitary distracted hen, aided by the slender warmth of smouldering wood ashes and by many words of sage advice and dubious counsel from the anxious housewife. What a strange little colony this is—a "vill" of the Conqueror's days!—some four or five roofs, and scarcely more than one score souls dwelling under them, including all, even the old bedridden crone and the last new-born babe. What a quaint straw-built shed too is here!—sturdy survival, spite of frail materials, of the rustic fashion of Edwardian days, patched and mended until nought original and yet everything old remains. Around it doubtless many times on moonlight nights the timid hinds with their slim-legged young have drawn near to sniff and browse, and one might almost be persuaded some famished wolf, even, may have howled near this loose-latched door in dead of winter: for "Wolf-ridge" is the name to this day of a



farm not far off. How picturesque are these old names ! Hear one of them—then with closed eyes you see a vision ! Melbury—*Moel-byrig*, the strong place on the rounded hill ; Motcombe—*mote-combe*—the valley of folk-mote or tribes-meeting, and standing over it a hill King-settles, the chieftain's seat ; Compton—*combe-ton*—the village in the valley ; Hatch—the entrance to the forest ; Dinas Hollow, Boyne Hollow—sunken paths to water ; Hawking Down, Hawksden, Hawkers Bottom—places commemorative perhaps of dirt as well as of wild sports ; Ashmore, Ashgrove, Ashcombe—all in a ring, on soil favourable to the growth of the sacred tree, and where troops of the King's deer once fed on soft rind and juicy sprays ; Tollard Royal—sacred to the name of hunting King John ; Butts Knap—the archery ground, and hard by Bowyer's-Mead and Back-o'-butts ; Sixpenny Handley and Fi'penny Okeford—a sequence in copper coins apparently, but really unconnected with each other and but an odd chance coincidence, *Sex Pennæ* meaning Six Hills, and Fi'penny being a corruption of Fitzpain ; Hugglers Hole, Gutch Common and Gutch Pool—a hollow place with water, the Norfolk peasantry still carrying water in a big-bellied brown jug called a "gotch" ; Prystock Corner—the fenced place where the Abbey tithe-collector used to store his grain ; Bere Knap—the grassy hill ; Crook-hays, Fern-gore, Bury-court, Denes-leas—names of farms ; Blex Hill and Bleacon Field—the latter retaining almost pure its Anglo-Saxon name, *Blican*, the white chalky hill-side ; as does also Wadmel Farm—*woadmel* or *woddemel* being the name of an old-fashioned coarse home-spun cloth ; Culver House and Pigeon House, names of farms, one in the old the other in

the modern mode ; Green Pleck, or glade, near the old Witch Lane ; and Cranbourne Chase—the river marshes tenanted by cranes being the chief feature in the landscape, in the angle of the old Chase where the two rivers meet again, that would strike the eye of lordly hunters coming up with hawk and hound from the great New Forest just made in Hampshire.

The long low cottage roof of lichen-dappled thatch, upborne on dwarf wattled walls springing from oaken "sell," plunges at one lowly end lovingly into the sheltering bosom of dry sandy bank, but lords it at the other, from a towering altitude of some eight feet, over the small domain of cabbage plot and straggling border of old-fashioned flowers of scent—columbines, gillyflowers, and marigolds, which seem to fling back a saucy smile to the one span-wide blinking casement in the *lofty* gable. Close by the cottage is the wheelwright's shop—remote from farms but near the sources of supply—retired from the prying sun beneath the shade of a tall tree, and innocent of much sawdust and unseemly heat. There in the open shop sits the venerable maker of wains, field-gates, and sheep hurdles, giving directions to a couple of hard-working lads ; the entire stock-in-trade of useful timber being the produce of the neighbouring woods and coppices—well-seasoned ash for felloes and lumps of elm for hubs, tapering fir poles and buff-coloured recently barked rungs of sturdy oak for gates, with upright clusters of soft-rinded alder poles and shining hazel rods. All these will be shaved and trimmed and fashioned leisurely, upon approved methods handed down from generation to generation, into various rustic appliances, sound and good and full of a homely beauty of

fitness ; the aim kept steadily in view, with a blind kind of stupid honesty, being to turn out good work, conservative of ancient reputation and fitted to resist rude shocks from hardened clods and rustic clumsiness, rather than to amass unrighteous increase of a certain small store of crown pieces ; which—the matter being an open secret—rests sacred in the Bristol-china teapot upon the right-hand corner of the wood moulded mantelpiece in the tiny blue-panelled parlour. By the aid of various small industries this little clan of homely folk—the self-reliant poor, contrive to live decent lives, useful to the commonwealth by honest outcome of patient labour, and redeemed from grimiest gripe of sordid poverty by the liberal winds and blessed cleansing dews of heaven. The small amount of actual specie a whole family of such humble citizens find it necessary and needful to earn and spend in a twelvemonth will not equal the cost of one city madam's single robe ; the rest of their income being made up of small economies and slender windfalls, coming as freely to them as the withered leaves fluttering down into their little gardens in autumn ; the arithmetical computation of money-value thereof being a task beneath and beyond the skill of the most painstaking sociologist. Yet from this humble stock healthy branches spring—the surplus boys and girls drift away to towns in service, or take steadily to farm-work ; some few brave the terrors of the sea and the doubtful hospitality of a foreign shore, sending back at long intervals painful scrawls descriptive of their new home, where there is plenty of land to be had for the asking ; while now and then a lad of quicker parts, fired by wild whisperings of adventure that come to him mysteriously upon the rough hill-side, may attain to the glory of a scarlet

coat, and even have the privilege of spilling his blood in his country's service : after endurance of which process, if his life be spared, he may after many wanderings return to his native hamlet there to eke out the remainder of his days, the pride and oracle of all his kins-folk, and passing rich with one arm, a golden pension of eight pence per diem, and license, by bland consent of the community, to get gloriously drunk on every recurring quarter-pension day.

The women in these small communities still preserve a method of cooking homely messes on occasion, in accordance with some old customary recipes handed down by art of imitation from mother to daughter, which vary the sour monotony of potatoes and bacon (oftener potatoes without bacon) or of bread with little butter washed down by very weak tea. Is it possible a common origin may be assigned to these rustic stews and that larger inheritance of such deft cookery enjoyed by peasant women of Normandy? The evil of our modern English system of culture is that this pleasant culinary art—along with other old customs—is invariably sacrificed to the exigencies of the next step in advance towards what is falsely called a better style of living ; killed dead, indeed, under the destroying stroke of that same dire delusion—a painted Devil, who with cord and poison behind his tinsel mask, holds terrible sway over all classes of our society, from Shoddy Castle to Ottoman Loan Cottage, and even down to our poor little vill !

One summer morning I strolled into a cottage where in preparation for the mid-day meal the pot was on the fire, and seeing a lid of paste simmering a-top of some old-fashioned mess, " spiered " about it with a kindly feeling of

pleasant anticipation ; but the poor woman blushed uneasily as she excused it, and laid the blame of it upon her daughter, a clear eyed lass of fourteen, who turned away her face guiltily, and I fear determined that it was time to give up gran'mother's custom of making skimmer cake !

Surely these little self-helpful communities are low enough down to be the lowest *honest* class in the social scale of Her Majesty's subjects ?—or surely in a powerful and wealthy country like ours they ought to be !—but, alas ! there is a much larger class who in the mere matter of money earnings may be on a par with or above them, but who in every other respect are far below them—the ordinary agricultural labourer. It is to be feared that in many localities the best type of agricultural labourer is slowly disappearing ; while herded in the suburbs of provincial towns there is a class, which subsists chiefly by doing agricultural labour of a kind, that is as degraded and as helpless and hopeless as were the villeins in the days of William Rufus—and who shall venture to say they are not more so !

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE CHACE.



AS it ever the picturesque custom in England for the women of a village to combine together on certain days for the purpose of holding a "buck-washing?" Shakespere makes merry over the woes of the fat knight on such an occasion by Thames' brimming margin; and we meet with obscurer reminiscences in the names of places. In one west country village I find what may be translated "the Bleaching Field" and "Dry-hedge ground" close together; in an ancient town "Laundry Lane" leading from the Abbey demesne to the springs in the meads; and here in the shady hollow, at the bottom of the steep lane, not far from the upland hamlet where water is so scarce, is "Washers'-pit." The women still call a large washing "a book," with a corrupted meaning attached to it as of *bulk*; "buck" being really the old name of the ley prepared for the great washing. I have heard in Norfolk the musical drip, drip of the "lye leach" into the tub at night, as the water slowly percolated through wood ashes preparatory for the morrow's washing. Along this moist bottom by "Washers'-pit"—where alders growing in apparently dry places tell of hidden springs—we enter a sylvan region tangled thick with tall-grown green-leaved hazel boughs, amid which shim-

mering covert the roving "nutter" may wander long hours before emerging again into clear daylight.

The gathering of nuts is here quite a local industry—a harvest reaped principally by women and children and a few old men, sufficiently profitable to make a welcome addition to the precarious annual earnings. The chief market for the hazel nuts, in a wholesale way, is London, and so the "brown shells" of this solitary western Chace go to attract the admiring gaze of buyers in the busy avenues of Covent Garden Market. There has been an occasional demand for the nuts in an unripe state, the juice of the green husk affording a sharp acid, useful for some manufacturing process of dyeing; many tons having been sent off from this locality alone for that purpose only a few years ago. But when this ancient Chace was disfranchised, though the rights of the landowners and leaseholders were respected, the humbler rights of the poor, founded rather upon the beneficence of old custom than upon statute or common law, met with the neglect usual in such cases, and even quite recently the gentlemen of the long robe have been busy with the nutters, whose labours have been interdicted in favour of pheasants and rabbits.

Traces of the holly fences which formerly protected the young shoot of vert in the coppices still remain; and the annual custom of the local pack of foxhounds to meet for the first day's hunting on the twenty-fifth of September, upon the Fair ground beneath the old British and Roman hill camps, is still kept up, although the memory of the fact that on that day the last buck was also always killed is now forgotten. At the bottom of the noise, rude mirth, and license

of the old fairs there was ever a basis of substantial business, of which this great Dorset fair—now shorn of its ancient dignity and importance—was an eminent example. In those days of limited intercourse and restricted means of locomotion the regular established fair brought together from isolated places buyer and seller, and enabled the tenants of remote hamlets and lone farms to lay in conveniently a seasonable store of summer or winter necessities. At this great fair, in the fall of the year just before the winter rains set in, the principal tradesmen from the towns within a radius of many miles did not think it beneath their dignity to erect large booths in regular streets for the sale of boots, gloves, hats, ready-made clothes, drapery, groceries, salt provisions, cutlery, and hardware ; the vale farmers brought the produce of their dairies, the upland yeoman purchased a stout saddle or a duffle riding-coat, or, in times more remote, his winter's store of gunpowder or tobacco ; the county gentry, with the Lady Bettys and Marys of the period, attended in their clumsy coaches or on horseback ; while the labourer bought a new bill-hook and whit-leather hedging gloves, or, if in the green days of courtship, a new hat or a roll of bright ribbon for his Molly—she nothing loth to pay him back with a kiss, or to dance a reel at the fair with any young man of her acquaintance. There was doubtless debauchery in those days ; but in the dreary survival, the pleasure fair of to-day, there is debauchery and nothing else ; while to the peasant what used to be an annual reunion, to be talked about and dwelt upon for half a year, is now but a rough incident in a dull life, robbed of all that once made the fair a scene of happiness—to the poor



peasant at least. The flood of progress which has swept other classes to greater material prosperity if not to higher and nobler lives, has merely left our labouring population stranded in unwholesome shallows ; doubtless with some faint reflex on their social status of the general amelioration, by them almost impossible to be appreciated, but reft of almost all that once gave colour and motive to their lives.

The greatest evil running riot in our present imperfect social system is the inordinate love of Money—a national passion the germ whereof when kept under strict control is the root of our national prosperity, but grown rank and rampant becomes an o’ermastering fetichism, at whose gross altar the manly virtues of courage, self-reliance, self-respect, and independence are sacrificed, while a false standard of worth springs up before which the vain and foolish are content to bow weak knees, wrapt in a tinsel mantle of appearances—seeming rich at all hazards! It is a spirit akin to this which has evolved from our wholesome industries of a century ago “Hell-holes” in manufacturing and unwieldy tenancy-farms in agricultural enterprise : the apogee in the revolving path of progress, from which they must be recalled to wise accord (with a difference) with ancient models before a healthier polity can be assured.

On a rough level of upland waste, wedged into the fork where two steep roads meet, stands—if such can be said of anything so lowly—a modest “mansion in its own grounds.” The two steep roads, locally called “droves,” go rambling over the rolling shoulder of the table-land, diverging more and more as they pursue their tortuous way, but each alike,

through the bosom of a sunny hollow, hastening down to cheerful village life below; leaving the little hut to its lofty solitude. The chalky subsoil is dry, and in all but the keenest weather the upland air salubrious; but on dark and stormy winter nights this is a wild spot for a solitary old man to dwell in. Yet he does not complain, as he comes forth from his cabin door with a respectful greeting,—“I can stand here on a clear day,” says he, “an’ count seventeen churches!” “Yes, there’s no other water on this chalk hill, an’ that’s why I made the catch-pit, as you see it; the water runs in clouded after a hasty storm, but it settles an’ gets clear. I do like it better than spring-water—’tis softer. Oh, yes, I *drink* it; but then ’tis always *boiled* first.” “I built th’ little house, an’ brought th’ bit o’ land into cultivation—’tis about two acres, an’ I pay, maybe, about two gold half sovereigns once in six months—that’s how I agreed it—an’ I built the little house an’ all, an’ it’s mine as long as I do live!” The “little house,” low and long, as if couchant with its head to the winter wind, although so new is designed after an ancient type: that which a man follows when left to his own resources—his innate faculty as a natural builder, with some unconscious aid of imitation. A few bricks for the one chimney (“th’ tun”) and a portion of the walls hauled up the steep hollow by the labouring pony in tiny loads from a distant brickyard, a few slim poles from the adjoining Chace, a little straw for thatch, with much ingenuity and far more patient labour, and there is the little cote—seven feet high to the eaves and some ten feet wide from out to out of walls—all on the ground floor, living room and bedrooms, with adjoining outhouse, stable, and pig-sty,

finished in every respect complete : fit dwelling for a poor man content to help himself rather than be helped. "Thirty-six years ago I came to live here first," resumes the old man, as he vigorously plies his steady labour of making sheep-hurdles out in the open-air, "an' I'm between sixty an' seventy year old. I remember all these downs when none on 'em were cultivated, an' we boys used to come up here to th' top o' th' hollow and play 'burn-ball' on Sundays. 'How do 'e play it?' Why you make a big ring and then strike out a ball with a bat, an' then you catch it an' run round, an' try to throw it in again. Many a time I've zeed Mr. S——d a-cricketing till 'twas time for afternoon service, then he'd run into church just as he was, an' slip on his gown, an' in about twenty minutes he'd be back again. 'Many worse parsons than he!' Yes, indeed! An' many worse men! His son blowed up th' gurt gates in India! They were always plucky an' ready for any duty. I've worked at farm-work a good déal hereabouts. I were bred a boy at F——l M——n, and worked at S——n W——n a long while for the Archdeacon when he first made his model farm up here. I travelled about with a machine (thrashing) for thirty years. There used to be a deal o' spirit in farmers then; there's not so much on't now as there used to be: an' I sometimes think whether th' Down wont go back again to what it was. Th' labourers, too, get to be more careless then they used to 't; they do n't work so hard as they used to when I was young—not near; an' nobody seems to care to do this sort o' work now—hurdling an' such like—it is hard work fetching th' stuff up from th' coppice. I buy th' copse wood here in the Chace, or at Stubhampton Bottom, or where I can get it, an' pay from

ninepence to eighteen pence a lug (perch) for it ; then I have to cut an' load it, and my old pony hauls it here. It is work for th' pony an' me ; an' we get a chance job of hauling, here and there, in the run of the year to help keep him in work an' pay for his 'keep.' I make perhaps thirty or forty dozen hurdles in th' run of a year one with another, an' get about eight shillings a dozen for them." The little holding upon which this man dwells, and which with some extraneous help of casual income has maintained him, his family, and pony, enabled him to build a cottage, to transform a patch of waste into a garden, and to train up a healthy progeny now dispersed, is thus cropped,—as we now observe, walking through it and admiring the waving barley and the tall-strawed vigorous wheat full in ear,—three-fourths of an acre, divided from the rest by a rough bank which forms a parish boundary, laid down to permanent pasture of clover and field grasses—for this the rent paid is one pound a year ; the other portion, for which the annual rent is also only one pound in consideration of the land having been reclaimed and the house built, consists of sixty perches wheat, seventy barley, forty dredge (oats and barley) for the pony, and the remainder cabbage and potatoe garden, not forgetting the grass margined "catch-pit," and a few patches of flowers : in all about two acres. "Well, as to manure," says he, "I do most with artificials, it's better than you mi'd think an' spares labour,—perhaps I spend two or three pounds a year for guano and *nitre soda*—what d'ye call it ? I learnt how to handle artificials when I was with th' archdeacon—then in winter I keep two or three pigs, and there's th' pony. 'What do I earn outside this patch ?' Well, what is it ? I can't say ! 'Five

shillings a week' one with another you mean?—well, certainly not more than that, *now*. There's only me an' my grandson!"

Here a remarkable sentiment is uttered, voluntarily and without being in any way led up to by question or suggestion — "IT 'U'D BE A GOOD BIT BETTER IF OUR COUNTRY 'U'D DO IT LIKE THIS A LITTLE BIT MORE!"

"Yes, I can read an' write,—biggest pairt o' what I learnt was at night-school. I went to night-school for years at the Archdeacon's an' learnt to read an' write. When I first came up here I built th' house, an' then I got married. My wife's been dead this seven years. We had four children, an' they are all married—except one that is dead—and are gone away an' have children of their own. Then a sister came up to live with me and bid awhile, an' then she died two years ago. Now I live here alone with only my grandson, an' I suppose I shall keep here now an' *see no more on't*, but just bide where I am till I die too!"

I point out to him the gleam upon a gable on the blue hills sixteen miles distant, I knowing well where to look for it, and he recognises it with an exclamation!—pretty well, I mentally whisper, for nearly three score and ten,—and I wish him long days to come and prosperity as I bid him good-bye.

As the eye roves over the undulating prospect from such a vantage ground as spreads here in front of this lone cottage, it is pleasant to note with critical observation what a rich variety of tints combine to suggest the general

verdant effect ; for the country is still fresh and bright beneath the dripping smiles of a warm July.

For our artists to admit the insuperable difficulty of painting, true to nature, such a verdurous scene as this, is to ignore the most characteristic feature of English west-country landscape—and the substitution of hot tints as of arid Spain, or of mists and purples as of Wales or Caledonia is but a weak begging of the question. Of greens alone how many may be counted, from the deep almost black hue of mature elm-foliage to the delicate chrome of flowering charlock,—the lush green of breadths of new-mown aftermath, the tanned green of drying hay, the brown-toned greens and warm-gray greens mingled roughly on the hot southern slopes where folded sheep have cropped and trampled the tall field-grass, the sage-green shot with russet of full eared wheat hastening towards golden brown of ripeness, the hoary green of bending Tartar oats, and the glossy liquid-green of oak boughs waving over them. Within the limits of green alone here is a range of colour sufficient to banish from our canvas the staring monotone which too often crudely does duty for verdure of spring ; —we might stipple our green slopes with a score of pencils charged with varying hues, but that the *surface* would be utterly wrong unless softened by a distance not always convenient in viewing a picture. The interlacing hedges—rows rambling about the lower terraces, and clumps of trees and bushes dotting the nearer levels—so charming in the living landscape—might in a picture be correctly stippled and blotched with grays browns reds and greens innumerable. A modest undertone of contrast is furnished by the white scarped scaur of some lime-kiln or chalk-pit

in the round face of the hill, or by browns and solid grays of new-ploughed fallow, or by soft rolling leas of blossoming clover, with mingled purples of the common Red and grayish-greens and white of Dutch clover, gleaming bright on the swells and fading to lucid shadow in the hollows ; while a more brilliant contrast may flash out from some swelling lawn kissed by an errant sunbeam, suffusing with a flush of glowing crimson the ripe *Trifolium*. Beyond all is the distant encircling rim of hills, standing out clear after rain, in every tender shade of liquid blue ; and above all the lofty vault, mantled with lustrous folds of gray, cool purple, and gleaming coppery white.

In June, before the tender ears of corn have burst their spiky sheaths, patches of bright local colour shine forth—rank blossomed charlocks spreading yellow above the juicy barley, or flowering poppies staining with a delicate vermeil tint the green breadths of springing wheat. Yonder, as we top the broad forehead of the opposing hill, spreads such an undulating scene, with vivid colours so limpid and shadows so pearly it seems too ethereal for solid earth, but backed by a vast gloomy screen of ponderous woods standing dark and silent against the sky ; while just where, in the middle distance, some flaunting poppies exose their flaming scarlet to the sun, we see shrinking back, all silent and deserted, with its wan face shrouded in the dark bosom of the enfolding woods, the lordly mansion of a fated race !

The leaves of trees are not always green,—some foliage may be said never to be of that even colour. In fact the simple “ natural green,” which a colourist produces by due admixture of blue and yellow, is in nature the most

unnatural. The young leaves of the elm and of the beech are, in early spring, alike of a tender yellowish-green colour ; but the foliage of the elm soon changes to a sombre hue, deepening as the summer advances, almost to blackness, while that of the beech ripens to a deep bright green, broken with infinite play of light and shade. The foliage of the lime tree changes least of all, the young leaves on bursting the tender sheath are of a peculiar limp form and callow hue, which changes only to a tender juicy green, while the mature leaves preserve a delicate diaphonous texture through all the heats of summer. Elm trees are majestic in mass, a lofty screen of billowy elms forming a noble background to a gay garden scene, all life and colour, in fervid July ; beeches, on the contrary, are most elegant in detail, a play of delicate leaf form dots and dapples each graceful tree, while the lissom sprays as they gently stir turn the light under surface of the leaves to the breeze ; while lime trees are best for an avenue, the warm sunshine falls right through the soft verdurous canopy, an ambient flood of sheeny emerald light, which, combined with the scent of syrupy blossoms, and the drowsy revelry of bacchanalian bees, has a ravishing effect upon the senses : the golden memory whereof returns in dreams. The bursting leaves of the oak display chiefly a glossy yellow-green colour, but not universally so, for there is a range of colour from light yellow through citrines and russets to bright red in the foliage of a coppice of young oaks, and sometimes even in the verdant livery of a single giant tree. Sometimes a little spray—a shining pair—of such gay hued leaves bursting on tiny stem through the hard rind of a mighty bole, gives the high key note or contrast to a



charming harmony of delicate lichen tones, ashen and purple grays.

That horrid thing the "dead tree" of old fashioned conventional landscape painting was as unnecessary as unnatural, plenty of living effects of the kind being furnished by natural woodland scenery; nor need we wait till autumnal decay sets in to see them—for instance, the elms have already turned dusky and dark, while the young sprays of the walnut tree are only just displaying their first fresh livery of delicate light russet: a contrast striking enough for the most startling effect.

There is a vegetable dye which, with the present ruling passion for delicate shades so imperative, I wonder our ribbon makers and textile fabric dyers have not discovered and tried to imitate. It is a simple red of a peculiar subdued yet lucid shade, as if a ruddy glow were toned with cool green, if that were possible and could result in any tint clear and delicately translucent as this is. This fair red may be found occasionally in the bursting tips on some of the young growing shoots of hawthorn, though not by any means on all that look red; but more constantly and in greater perfection on the tender sprays of the common hedge-row maple. There are two more colours, far richer than that on the tips of hawthorn sprays and more glowing, to be found adorning the viscous buds of the sycamore—the great swelling buds adorning the slender wand-like shoots which spring from around the roots of wild growing sycamores. The upper portion of one of these slender wands cut off, some ten or twelve inches in length, with its two or three buds upon it, in varying stages of advancement towards the young bursting leaf, should, if

he have any eye for colour, afford the young artist delightful study for a long spring morning ; the wealth of colour to be found there, the delicious tones and gradations are beyond description ; it would need a volume, the eye of a painter the soul of a poet, to do justice to them ; but those two rich and precious tints to which I would fain more especially draw attention are to be found, if carefully looked for, on some of the brightest buds glowing intense and clear as flame of fire, the one lustrous as the purple petals of the full-blown peony, the other a clear crimson more brilliant than the mantling blushes of the red rose of Lancaster !

The old "King's-house" is in the very centre of the ancient Chace, shorn of any magnificence it may once have possessed, and presenting only one feature of any antiquity, a chimney stack of early Tudor brickwork ; although tradition is doubtless correct in regarding it as a foundation coeval with the days of King John, whose enduring imprint as a royal hunter is stamped far and wide upon all this sylvan district. The gallant spirit of the chase still fires the hearts of all the yeomen hereabout, although it is the deer no longer but only the wily fox that they pursue. There is no prettier sight than to watch from quiet covert the gambols of a litter of cubs with the maternal bitch fox, drawn from their retreat by the warmth of a sunny spring evening ; and it is one to be recommended to the attention of those ultra-keen sportsmen who look upon a fox only as vermin created to be hunted : if maternal tenderness, innocence, vivacity, capacity for keen enjoyment of life be qualities to appeal to human pity, then they appeal to us strongly here. It is a cruel inversion of the order of nature to over-pre-

serve your foxes and then to be compelled to slaughter ruthlessly ; indeed all artificial preservation, except such as wisely seeks to aid in keeping all wild creatures, alike the predatory and the preyed upon, within reasonable limits, is unnatural, oftentimes cruel, and sometimes—more especially in respect of such preserving as gives rise collaterally to social evils—distinctly wicked. It may be heresy in the estimation of the ardent sportsman to hint at sparing life, and there are canons of fox-hunting law demanding “blood” for the sake of the hounds, which claim some respect (although perhaps they receive more than on their merits they are worthy of) but still there are occasions when the life of the hunted beast might be spared. A man may enter with zeal into all the joys of the chase, share with keen relish in the wiles of wood-craft and the brave ardour of pursuit, exhibit in his own person those gentle and manly virtues—endurance, self-reliance, courage, courtesy—which are heightened and enhanced by the practice of hunting, and yet feel some twinges of sickly sentiment (which of course he conceals) when a brilliant run is succeeded by the breaking up of the fox. It may be quite too much to expect of a man that for the sake of avoiding participation in savage rites he should lag in the rear when fine riding and a gallant steed can carry him to the front ; nevertheless, if the truth might be told, there are many hard riders who could own to having felt a wish that a certain part of their experiences were not forced upon them by such a stern necessity. But leaving without further notice these fine-drawn speculations, is it too much to urge that a mild law should be passed conferring life upon the fox “gone to earth” after

showing "a good run?" It is no more than a fine courtesy would dictate as the respect due to a gallant foe. That man must be something more than a fair sportsman, and something less than a gentleman, who does not acknowledge having at some time felt a sickening rising of the gorge, as, rapidly cooling after the fierce excitement of a glorious run, he has awaited the small result of the tedious process of "digging out." There in the filthy drain, far from his native haunts, lies the poor beast who with such infinite display of intelligence and pluck has shown you the best run of the season—all his bravery oozing out of him as, cold and helpless, he listens to the dull thud of the spade coming nearer and nearer, and feels from the teeth of the snarling terrier the keen pang of insult undeserved; while a whole bevy of brave men and fair ladies, laughing, chatting, sipping cogniac, and trifling with "weeds," await the final scene. Here he comes at last! brutal hands are upon him, un pitying boors exult over him; and now, held aloft by the huntsman, there he is—surely not "Charley," who an hour ago with glossy sides and fluffy brush looked big as a shepherd's dog as he rattled so merrily away! Yes, 'tis he! The agony of crouching protracted terror has done its work, and the death of this poor, shrunken, mean, dragged, drowned-rat-like creature is the incident which all this brave company have been waiting so long for to see! Can you pause to note the poor extruding bowels, the rigid hideous grin, the lolling tongue, the ghastly introverted eye? No! delay the work no longer, but instantly let him be hacked to pieces, drawn and quartered by honest hard-riding Dick, transformed for the nonce into a sylvan Jack Ketch!

As you stroll along the outskirts of a quiet cover, pressing with noiseless footfall the yielding moss beneath the moist shade of nut-bush and bramble, suddenly a lithe animal drops smoothly off the bank through a run in the fence, then pauses carefully to go through the accustomed ceremony of reconnoitring; he does not "nose" you in your cool retreat, and you perceive at once he is a youth—a cub of the year—lathy and tall, almost arrived at fox's estate; he is a young dog fox, arrayed in all the bravery of new ungrizzled coat of rufus brown, with spotless white cravat and elegant brush! "What a darling fellow!" some of our lady friends would exclaim, if they could but see him. Having taken a rapid survey of the open, now he moves forward, limbs rigid, brush outstretched, every muscle in a state of tension, like the drawn bow-string, ready for instant flight if need be. It is just possible the young rogue really perceives you through a furtive corner of his eye, but he knows intuitively it is not the hunting season, and he sees you have no dog nor hostile engine with you, and divines sympathetically your benevolence of heart. Now the compelling sense of youth is upon him—it is not such a very long time ago he was a cub with his sage mamma—and gambol he must on this nice level turf, so velvety and cool, and smelling so sweet; he drops stretched out at full length, and endeavours calmly for awhile to realise his independence; then he rolls once, twice, over and over, faster faster—how delicious it is once you really begin!—then he starts up again and scouts along like a frantic thing, dragging first his left side then his right side along the grass to brush any lingering dust of cradle garments out of his span-new coat; then he

sits bolt upright on his haunches, combing his young whiskers with dainty incurved paw, after the manner of prim grimalkin; anon he drops suddenly on all fours again and gambols gaily about, hither thither, frisking twisting pirouetting, boiling over with levity of innocent glee—until just at the very moment you have decided he really *is* inviting you to come and play with him, he gives his hinder limbs a saucy flick, and is off. Away, away! he settles into his stride with arrowy speed, and yet with loins arched, and lolloping plummy brush, showing he is going well within himself, exulting in his strength, as he carefully keeps his course along the sheltered bottoms, hidden by grassy knolls from possible view of watchful foes; so incontinently you volley after him a cheerful yell, which rolls echoing down the combe, whereat he flies, as who should say, “See what I *can* do!” and flashes out of sight in a moment over the shoulder of yon distant slope.

This apple-faced merry gentleman—a born denizen of the Chace, and ardent fox-hunter, who once worked for “twopence a day,” that conventional rate of wages so often quoted vainly, but literally true in his case—has many hunting stories to tell; and he also remembers the rude manners of the forest folk in the days of his boyhood, long before the disfranchisement of the Chace. In the parish of T—d R—I, divine service used to be conducted in the parish church only on alternate Sundays by a non-resident clergyman, who rode over from a neighbouring village for the duty. The vacant alternate Sunday used to be devoted to a far different purpose, barbaric enough, but still bearing evidence of the existence

among the rude peasantry of an abiding love of justice—a fine sense, the keenness of which is now somewhat blunted under the rule of—lawyers! It was a kind of survival of the “ordeal of battle,” for on these high days all disputes among the rustics too bitter to be peaceably settled were brought to the final arbitrament of fisticuffs. No bullying was allowed; the fathers and heroes of the hamlet formed a stern ring, into which he who had the courage to put it to the touch must step, and there, if he felt it just, support his quarrel by such display of skill and endurance as might win approval from ploughmen, shepherds, deer-hunters, and “*the ladies*,” assembled to see fair play—mattering not so much whether he or his opponent might be hailed victor, so long as that neither should be hailed coward; and whenever he felt he had had enough, the judges were ready to cry “hold!” Such a rude mode of enforcing order has its evil aspects—as what institution of mortal, indeed, has not? and it may be unsuited to our present improved social condition; but one inestimable advantage undoubtedly redeemed it,—it kept down *lying*! The vice of cowards cannot flourish where the appellant has the right of disproof upon the wretched slanderer’s body! Should any reader propose to revive a court of this kind, it is only right to state the ancient practice in the case of ailing or impotent men and of the fair sex—*they might choose a champion*.

The form of holding Courts Baron is still maintained upon some estates within the limits of the ancient Outer Bounds, at which the chief ceremonies appear to consist in showing devotion to field sports and the pleasures of the table—the tenants and neighbouring farmers, led by the

steward, coursing hares upon the open lands in the morning, for which purpose they bring their own greyhounds, and dining together in the evening, when the coursed hares duly roasted make their final appearance in honour of the occasion. Some of the old school of tenants formerly attained to great local renown as breeders and trainers of greyhounds, and singers of after-dinner songs; some special chant attaching to each singer as of right, and being duly trolled by him on every annual occasion, it might be for thirty years, as secure of appreciative applause as the opinions of the oracles upon court rules were of reverence; anything new in either line being shunned by the court with a kind of general horror, no sweet influence of superior music, nor power of higher reason being of the slightest avail against the weight of custom. These pleasant observances preserve the memory green of the old Chace Courts, when the inhabitants of certain villages enjoyed the privilege of hunting the deer with the chace hounds; and also of Leet Ales, whereat there was wont to be general carousing. The coursing of hares may also be a survival of observances in connexion with the right to kill small game, or "free warren," enjoyed in forest days by Lords of Manors within the Chace.

In some few instances in the scattered villages of this sylvan region, allotment gardens of superior extent and cultivation are to be found, established in every instance by some aristocratic landowner, whose benevolent intelligence in regarding the vanished rights of the poor shine forth conspicuous by force of contrast. In one upland hamlet I find an allotment of forty "lug," held at the moderate rent of ten shillings a year, and kept in excellent cultivation by a



lame old man, who receives a contributory dole from the Board of Guardians of three shillings and sixpence and one loaf of bread per week for himself, his wife, and one child. In another instance in the richer lower lands I notice gardens of unusual size averaging about an acre for each allottee, and now in a high state of cultivation, the soil clean, in perfect tilth, and bearing heavy crops ; but where the universal complaint is reiterated about the difficulty of getting farmyard manure. "Well," says one bronzed allotment gardener, "I think I could maintain a family upon *four* acres of it, an' then you see I could kip a little horse besides, an' a cow of my own !"

Again, upon some land naturally of poor quality and lying exposed on the shoulder of a hill to the bleakest winds of spring, where several patches averaging about half an acre each are let to poor tenants, I am let into the open secret of profits made on potatoes, "plonts," and onions by one astute cultivator ; at hearing of which the ordinary farmer, guided by the light of *his* experience might well be excused for expressing incredulous wonder. When I see this poor cultivator of some three or four acres—for he holds in two or three localities, wherever he can get hold of a bit of land—doing tolerably well, maintaining a family, and keeping a pony and cart, with no other ostensible means of support than his meagre plots of ordinary land, and yet as I talk to him, solemnly sowing artificial manure, for which he has just paid eight shillings, as a top-dressing upon a patch of wheat less in extent than a quarter of an acre, I feel that he is the happy possessor of a breadth of resource and height of hope not shared in by his large-acred neighbour ; and his example sets one thinking, with some surviving power of

cheerful calculation even in these weak-kneed times, and even amidst this universal melancholy hum of murmurs about the inevitable coming decay and imminent downfall of profitable agriculture in this kingdom !

There is no place a countryman can take delight in equal to a garden, and seeing the poor cottar is by the course of events now deprived of almost all chance of any other cheerful resource, is it a thing too much to hope for, that the time is coming when every village and hamlet in England shall be surrounded by a belt of garden land allotted to the poor ? Such a system would at one blow abolish some vices, and would in the long run encourage the growth of many hardy simple virtues in our rural populations ; while our urban communities, and the kingdom at large would be benefited by a cheaper and better supply of those vegetable commodities for which we now send out our annual millions of specie to France. Tenant-farmers, especially those who farm on a large scale, object to labourers having allotment-gardens, and no wonder !—the two systems, as at present practised, are antagonistic ; but it may not be impossible to suggest some mode of operations whereby differences may be reconciled, and mutual benefits secured for landlords, farmers, and labourers.

As we hasten homeward, in the gloaming, a beautiful bird attracts attention, now alighting in the dust of the highway, now fluttering heavily about the adjacent hedge-rows,—can it be a cuckoo ? for cuckoos, too, have a habit of haunting unfrequented roads—but no, on nearer inspection, the row of beautiful white spots adorning the fan-like tail, together with its lighter and brighter hue, proclaim it to be a turtle-dove ; but, presently, we do see a cuckoo, fluttering along

persistently in front of us, then another turtle-dove, then a pair, and now again another pair, all within the length of a mile. Just as the waning light departs, and the wan face of the fields turns duskier, a novel sight presents itself,—a sloping field, that has been sheep-fed and roughly scarified, and wherein the labours of the plough have just commenced, is overspread by a silent company of rooks. Yonder, in the deep hollow of the Combe, is the rookery, with all the accustomed trees already shrouded in darkness; but here are the rooks, belated, and the colony will miss their cawing to night. It is upon the ploughed land alone they sit, scattered sparsely over the ground, each with its head facing uphill, but with beak turned downwards, point to the earth, in the very attitude of meditation,—the whole in the same identical position, silent, motionless, fast asleep! The unwonted vision of these sable sleepers lays hold on the imagination by some weird kind of fascination, and refuses to be exorcised—the very spirit of Pythagoras informing us they were once Dominicans evicted from some monastery hereabout, and that while solemnly engaged in repeating vespers to-night they lapsed suddenly—as monks, not birds—back again into death-like sleep!

## CHAPTER IX.

### ANGLING.



F all unpleasant kinds of reading there is none more intensely disagreeable than the records of angling matches in *Bell's Life*. Shades of Walton and Cotton!—that the contemplative man's recreation should be practised in a greasy crowd redolent of beer and 'baccy, uttering strange oaths, making the placid waters and silly fish only the medium of wagers and time bargains, and winding up the scene with careful weighing in ounces avoirdupois of slain fish; their requiem, poor silly things! sung not by the dying falls of darkling streams, but by slangy East-enders wrangling over betting-books. I do confess to having a strange horror even of scientific fishing—of men making elaborate essays in the gentle craft aided by all the varnished paraphernalia of the tackle shops, of perspiring spinners and per-fervid trollers; nay,—I say it humbly—I care not much for whipping rapid streams with the fly! Angling commends itself to my mind as the most artless of arts. I suppose it is through being not to the manner born, though I plead guilty to having caught trouts with a fly, and to having found genuine enjoyment during the process. But I love to take active exercise in other characters rather than in that of Piscator.

I admit—tholing the scorn of higher grade professors—being a lowly disciple of Walton, rather than of Cotton and all his successors of the modern school.

Ah, those dear remembered days of boyhood by Ancholme's placid tide—how vividly the scene returns! our twelve-foot rod, fine line, and bobbling float covering but a yard beyond the green-flagged bed of murmuring reeds, our prey some dozen red-finned roach and banded perch—I sniff the faint fresh-water-fishy odour of them now as they lie at the bottom of the ample creel decently strewn o'er with withered grass, but still a little dried by the mid-day glow,—the lofty air quivering with the song of many skylarks, the sunshine warm upon the fragrant grass, there where at lazy noon we stretched full length with shaded eyes and dreamed of great deeds to be done in future years! That leather-legged Mr. Maskell—he was, in fact, a master shoemaker—who used to excite our wonder as a kind of River Deity, hauling ashore huge snaky-looking jack with horrid jaws and vicious eyes, or monster perch that deigned to grace no other hook; how proud we were when he condescended to lift our tackle out of the water to practically explain for our use and benefit the mysteries of baiting, and how vividly impressed upon our memory that crowning day when he hooked a seven pound bream with forty yards of silk unwound from his reel, and when at the termination of the desperate drowning process he claimed our aid with the gaff to bring the broad-scaled leviathan to grass. With what wild delight we used to unpack the basket a fond mother had stored for us, and fall-to upon the savoury pasty in a reckless bandit fashion, feeling the long four miles away from *her*

authority placed us quite beyond the pale of law, and storing our memory with record of small adventures to charm her patient ear after our weary tramp home at night. That wooded ravine whose steep descent was eerie in the gloaming, and those plains of fragrant turnips wet with dew,—how long a time it seemed as we trudged across them wearily homewards since the bright hour in the morning when our heels were winged by ardent hopes! An empty creel was a dire disappointment, which a single dace even or speckled ruffe relieved; but when the gleaming spoils from a well-filled basket were brought home, what a triumph to have them duly ranged for show in the larder to be admired in turn by every member of the family, and by every friend who called.

Boiled shrimps used to be deadly bait in those brackish waters; and I well remember how one wild wintry day in March, spurred to high emprise by a sustained course of angling literature, we marched to F—y S—e, and casting into the dark waters, all ruffled by chopping waves, our lure of two bright red shrimps, it was instantly snatched almost at surface and carried off, with a first and second joint of hickory top and twenty yards of drop and reel line never to be seen again! We fished on, hoping against hope, for hours that day until driven off by bitter cold and keen vexation, and were haunted in our dreams at night by a vision of a sea-water shark lurking grimly at the bottom of a horrid lock.

It is singular how certain dreams continue to haunt the brain. I possess one such stock piece that at intervals has been presented to my mental vision during uneasy slumbers

for many years,—a pool of inky water profound as night, girdled around by precipitous cliffs of slaty hue all bleak and bare ; and walking uneasily upon the narrow marge, buried in deep shade, a silent fisherman, sooty and grim, casting deftly a gorge bait into the lake, from whence ever and anon, through the scarcely ruffled waters, a struggling fish with jaws distended like the maw of a python is drawn to shore in silence ;—and so the drama speeds, and other fish, undeterred by their companions' fate, continue to writhe in silence towards the dark Figure, until the curtain falls !

Rivers of a character drumly and deep exert upon certain minds a powerful fascination. Of such a character are some portions of the Waveney, creeping through solitary woods where rude marks upon the alder stems record the vicissitudes of winter flood ; also winding reaches of the western Stour, lingering in pools profound and dark, from which arise bare arms of trees contorted as if they once in agony appealed in vain for help from out the deeps ! Two small rivers, subject to the brackish influence of the tide, exhibit this gloomily savage character in a marked degree—the Hull and the Arun—and both bear a somewhat evil reputation. I remember being witness to a tragic event occurring in the latter stream. A poor little sailor lad fell overboard from some small Scandinavian vessel, and, being numbed by long drudgery in the cold and wet of an inclement day, he sank almost like a log and was whirled away to the sea ! It made a peculiar impression on one's mind to note the stolid apathy of the men on board—one, so it may have been, his father ! They made no effort at rescue, knowing well, perhaps, how futile any

such effort must prove ; but, after gazing sadly down the swaling waters for a few moments, turned in silence and resumed their work. What a story to take back to his fair-haired homely-visaged mother in her low-roofed cabin by the snow-clad pines !—there at least should rise upon the wintry air the tender wailing for the dead !

On a grander scale two estuaries, the Severn and the Humber—which roll down their turbid floods to opposite oceans—exhibit the same tragic character. What a fearful thing it is to note the insidious power of some smooth swirling vortex as the ebb-tide lapses rapidly away. Well might the Northern Rovers, whose business called them to stem such deeps as these, invest each fiord and inlet with a haunting fiend. It was the cruel side of Nature's face they saw ; what hearts of bronze they must have borne, pregnant with the future of the world, to brave all these visible dangers, backed as they were to them by the gloomy terrors of the unknown !

In some of these weird localities, while roving with live-bait for perch or jack, the fancy roams to those early days when ragged-hipped nomads fished the self same waters, and watched with hungry eyes the motions of the same wild creatures. The Water-hen and the Coote appear to acquire here a more stealthy way of moving, as if weaned from the fish-pond and the park back to their primitive mode of life and the ever-present necessity of self-preservation ; and though the Heron seldom alights to fish on the margin of these deeps, his mode of flight may be securely watched as he flaps his wide pinions, unconscious of your presence, across the reedy covert from whence you gaze. The Otter, shyest of



beasts, may by rare chance be studied as he rises like a fur-clad apparition above the water, floating a moment on the silent tide before his beady eyes and quivering nostrils are turned with unerring accuracy in your direction, when instantly he dives, and you will neither see him nor hear him again in that place any more. The Water-Voles drop head-long from the banks into the stream with an almost noiseless "flop," presenting the least possible surface of resistance to the water and making no splash; then, having attained depth enough, dart away with a scurrying motion towards the point they wish to reach. This little animal is the British Beaver, a different creature to the disgusting rat, although by common error classed with it, and should not like it be ruthlessly destroyed. It is a pretty sight to watch one of these little soft-furred creatures sitting upright on its haunches (as the squirrel does) upon a platform of aquatic herbage, and nibbling, by aid of handy paws, the young succulent root of water plantain, its face the while wearing an engaging air of innocence.

There are few people who can learn to admire the beauty of the Water Snake,—an assured conviction of its perfect harmlessness alone enabling one to handle it, and even then not without an involuntary shudder; but its gentle habits, beautiful colours, and graceful motions, well repay the exercise of a little moral courage to enable one to secure a close acquaintance. This snake preys on frogs; and it is *not* a pleasant sound to hear when poor froggy squeaks in mortal terror, held tight in the grasp of cruel fangs. When animals are in mortal terror they suddenly find a voice, which not only appals their kind, but strikes a chord of sympathy even in human hearts. The

cry of the poor hare caught in a toothed gin, or fastened upon by the deadly stoat, so exactly resembles a young child's scream that no bereaved mother could hear it unmoved ; while a young weanling calf, torn from the warm side of its dam, and cruelly beaten by ruffian boys (as those helpless mild-eyed creatures too commonly are) utters a gasping sob so sonorous and thrilling, it has a sickening effect upon a person of fine-strung nerves. There is something more in this than mere sensibility ; we catch in these ebullitions of highly-wrought feeling the exact meaning of the inferior creature's appeal, in a way which indicates the bond of a common nature. Does not this fact also suggest the reflection that we, in our supremest moments of agonised despair or love, are capable of inspiring a higher sympathy ; linking us, in turn, to a diviner nature ? Those instances—spoken of among us in whispers, as being fabulous or supernatural—of dying messages borne through space to those most loved, may they not some day come to be understood and accepted as the common boon of our more refined natures ?

The terror of weak creatures in presence of their natural enemies is exemplified by the little minnows and by the young fry of roach and dace, which dart frantically about, and even leap out of the water, in excess of frenzy, at the approach of some shadowy pike or glaring perch ; so that frequently the angler is made aware by the commotion among the small fry of the coming of the larger fish, long before, by peering down between the floating lily leaves, he perceives them gliding almost imperceptibly through the glimmering water.

There is no bait for jack or perch so deadly as the live gudgeon, and no way of using it so pleasant as "roving," varying the size of your bait and the stoutness of your tackle according to the nature of the sport you have in view. The proper tackle to use in this kind of fishing, for perch, is a single lip hook on sound gut, with a few shot on the bottom length, and a running line of silk and horse-hair, but without a float;—for jack, everything must be stouter,—a trolling rod with upright rings, reel-line of dressed woven silk, a length or two of dark-dyed salmon gut, collar of fine gimp with a swan shot or two, a small lip hook armed on a short shifting trace, and a stout single hook to be attached to the back fin of the bait, which may be a two-ounce gudgeon (if obtainable), and using a light float—the largest size Thames roach-float is the best—to ease the "drag" upon the live-bait; but chiefly to spare the muscles of your arm unnecessary labour, and your mental faculties the wasteful strain of too close and constant attention to small details. With tackle of this kind of medium strength, roving along the banks of a full flowing stream, in the late autumn months, very fair sport of a mixed character—with jack and perch indifferently—may be enjoyed; a well-filled creel, and mind and body braced by free air and moderate exercise being quite sufficient, in the strictest sense, to satisfy any honest angler. But, in specifying this kind of fishing, the object proposed is one a little in advance of mere sport, by pointing out a mode, tolerably shaped *via media* whether on the score of expense, potentiality, or right use of faculties, and as being *one* way, at least, of securing fair sport—*good* sport—with just that quality of tempered freedom, both of

mind and body, which justifies us in styling Angling "the contemplative man's recreation." The bottom-fisher's art, allows the mind free play enough, but it is too sedentary, and in some of its aspects too vulgar; the fly-fisher's too exigent in practice, and placed by circumstances too much beyond the popular reach. But there is one heavy charge that may be alleged against our pet mode to which no other plea is possible than "*guilty*"; yet, if the live bait be tenderly used and the roving skilfully pursued, the cruelty, I would fain hope, is not so gross as it is in some other methods of fishing. Nevertheless, when *this* lunge is made, I am almost constrained to drop my point, cry mercy, and own the superior claims of fly-fishing!

In a district of East Anglia, where suitable ponds abound, I used frequently to be stirring just before the dawn, and having taken a brisk walk of from two to three miles, would catch a respectable basket of golden tench and return home almost before the busy world was fully awake and active. The best season to fish for tench is "when the wheat is in *blooth*," and the early mornings at that lusty time have a delicious charm peculiar to them alone. The memory of those pleasant excursions dwells in the mind like the scent of garnered lavender in a cabinet of fair damasked linen—homely, but of a quality not to be replaced by costlier perfumes. Nor in a gastro-nomic point of view is a dish of tench to be despised,—fresh caught, and delicately broiled to a clear brown, with not too much aid from artificial sauces, a fair-sized golden tench may wrest the palm even from the trout as a breakfast delicacy.

Were "pot-hunting" the only object, night would be the best time for fishing. The carnivorous and predatory fishes—the pike, the perch, the eel, the trout, all feed most freely by night. The poacher's hour—the twilight hour, when the round red sun has just dropped out of sight, and steaming mists cling like a cloak to the river-side meadows—is chosen as much from the knowledge that "set lines" are most profitable by night, as it is for purposes of concealment. A loach on a stout night-line is a deadly snare for an eel ; and many a lordly trout has fallen a victim to the same rough allurements : the four-pounder trout not being nice in his feeding during the hours of darkness. The twilight hour of evening, when the 'squire is dining the farmer at tea, and the labourer munching his supper, is the time when the poacher's sodden boots are crushing the strong-smelling horse-mint and dew-laden coltsfoot, as he sets his lines by the lonely river ; the twilight hour of morning, before the sun has dispersed the fog, or the village chimneys have begun to smoke, is the time when he takes them up again ; craning forward through the reed-beds to spy with eager eyes what luck the night has brought him !

In some of the villages near the river, but generally in the one only small market-town which nestles on its banks for miles, a character resides whom it would be unfair to term a poacher : yet such he is not unfrequently dubbed by over-officious keepers, or by young gentlemen fresh from college, anxious to air their superior insight of the wicked world. In the crude opinion of these witlings "labourer" appears to be a convertible term for "rascal" ; and they hum and lisp over incredible stories of what their friends, and even themselves, have done in circumventing the

nefarious projects of such "artful beggars!" Should an unfortunate poaching affray have taken place—a most rare thing except in the vicinity of large towns, and even there occurring but seldom,—perhaps quite needlessly brought on by the stolid pugnacity of keepers, or by the windy courage of such young Bobadils, the stories thereafter circulated among the village gossips, the initiatory yarn having been delivered by the harness-room fire and thence disseminated by servants and interested loungers, contain a list of killed and wounded fit for the *Gazette* after Waterloo; the meagre truth, possibly, being that one man's head was broken, who had previously been identified, and could have been dealt with by law without the aid of physical force.

But our old friend of the little river-side town has no connection with these bad characters, although an evil taint does corrupt his good name in certain quarters. He is, in reality, as harmless and as free from guile—except in his dealings with fish and amphibious creatures—as poor old Bidy, who creeps from village to village with her basket of cakes. That the "gentleman in velveteen" should honour him with so much of his attention is in reality an insult; although poor old Isaac's weather-beaten hide is proof against such open-handed smiting. Few of the waters in Isaac's neighbourhood are strictly preserved, and he has a permit to fish the "main river" from kind-hearted Squire B., who remembers regretfully the rude sympathies of a generation past away, and has the moral courage in a time of change to practise what his heart approves. That Isaac should be able to make and mend fishing nets is a matter of course, but he also manufactures cabbage nets, which he sells to the housewives at a moderate price; for

so deft have his fingers become from long practice that they continue to pass the broad wooden needle through the mesh, even when, overcome by the heat, he drowzes on the garden bench, where his bee-skeps are ranged. He also gathers and sells watercresses, groundsel for canaries, and freshly-cut sods for caged larks. A number of tiny bird-cages are hung on the south wall of his cottage when the sun shines, canaries, goldfinches, linnets, occasionally a skylark—poor prisoner! restless with the levity which fain would lift him to the clouds. If you want a handsome mule-bird, Isaac is the man to accommodate you; but for that choice songster he exacts his highest price—three half-crowns! The errands entrusted to Isaac by farmers' wives and rustic belles in remote villages are multifarious, and often perversely urgent,—as he pathetically says, it never rains but it pours—and occasionally, for some "best" customer, the tender-hearted old fellow hobbles four or five miles out and back, at the close of a long day, carrying a heavy parcel for the trifling guerdon of a sixpence. Sometimes a frugal wife pays him for his convenient services in kind, giving him a hunch of bread and cheese, and plying him with more cider or heady ale than is good for him,—it being a point of honour to accept the second measure when offered, and to leave no heel-taps in the cup. On such occasions he sings a plaintive ditty about a "Village-Born Beauty," or a bold one about "Captain Brooke," in a peculiar high-pitched minor key with prolonged tremolo cadences, after the manner of the lamented Incledon; or when unusually loquacious, is induced to tell that tremendous adventure of his when he caught the huge dog-otter—a service he essayed on the advice of Squire B., and by means of a

rabbit gin! "I baited un, missus," he will say, "wi' a beautiful trout-fish, an' then I tailed un by Willum Haskol's mill, just below th' whirly-pool, an' then I fastened un wi a piece o' dog-chain to dthick big tharnen bush, an' there I lef' un covered auver wi' a few benets so sweet as any gurt otter could wish, just vor-un to help 's self in th' grey o' the evenen, or as it mid be, most likely, at night." In the morning old Isaac returned, and found, to his amazement, a fierce beast mounted up, through madness of feverish torment, in the hawthorn bush, cruelly held by one mutilated paw in the gin secured to the "dog-chain." It never clearly appears whether Isaac "went" for the otter, and so got dragged into the river and nearly drowned; or whether the beast was slain by hastily summoned aid of the miller and his men, who, in excess of zeal, accidentally hustled Isaac into the water; but invariably the story ends with a muttered malediction on the great black creature, as big as Squire B.'s Newfoundland dog, which from its supernatural strength and malignity must have been the Evil One himself. There is a persistent tendency on the part of rustic folk to associate everything evil and strange with the direct personal action of Satan—a relic, perhaps, of the demonology of Puritanical days; or more probably of the anthropomorphic superstitions of times still more remote.

One of the most legitimate occupations of such men as old Isaac is in catching live-bait for anglers. A hint given a few days beforehand, will ensure a bait-kettle full of lively minnows, or a supply of gudgeon, or some nice sized roach or dace fit for gorge-bait, or for trolling for jack. I had, when I first knew him, a



difficulty in inducing Isaac to bring me gudgeons alive—they are difficult to keep in that condition, and he would say, glancing uneasily from under the brim of his old tattered hat, “‘minnies’ be the right bait for perch, sir!” but he bowed meekly to superior judgment; yet even, I thought, with some latent gleam of smothered sarcasm. These men have a wonderful knack of spreading the cast-net, a most difficult operation with a net of any size at all times, and not to be performed cleverly until after long practice; yet I knew one once, a different built man to Isaac, broad in the shoulders and very muscular, who could spread perfectly a net of thirty-six feet diameter. This man’s method was to secure the central cord of the net with a running noose round his right arm, then, after shaking and adjusting all its folds to make sure none were tangled, he would proceed to pack the net methodically fold over fold upon the broad deltoid muscle of the left shoulder, having first raised and firmly flexed his left arm in a horizontal position, then gathering the few leading folds in the right hand with the leads pendant he would sway his body half round two or three times until the proper impetus had been attained, when, with a vigorous jerk, away the net would fly, gradually curving round until the whole would be cast upon the sounding water in a proper circle. The strange thing was to see how the folds would continue to fly off from the fisherman’s shoulder, one after another (he standing still the while) when the apparent impetus of the final jerk had ceased, as if that mighty effort had put life into the leads and cordage, and had endowed their inanimate substance with the power of volition!

The angler sometimes meets with strange disappointments when visiting streams that are not preserved. On one occasion, being invited thereto by the friendly miller, I drove to a mill-stream of good local repute anticipating fine sport among the brook trout with the "blue dun;" but not only had I no success, but could detect no sign of fish in any way about the dead-looking water. To a stolid lad, who shamled up, I addressed the question, "*Are there any fish here?*" to which he replied boldly, "'Es, sir, he-aps on 'em!"

"How do you know that?" I demanded sharply, feeling there was some foolish mystery.

"Because feyther," said the rascal deliberately, "took out *three bushels* of 'em last night!"

I afterwards learnt "feyther" was a noted hand with the cast-net.

One chill October day, with spiteful rain occasionally darting from the clouds, I was engaged fishing, in company with two friends, when a Lesser Tern came flying along, borne directly up stream on the wings of the south-east blast: her distance from the sea being thirty-two miles. As she returned and continued to hover about us, I made a cast in the air directly in front of her, with a live minnow, at which she swooped, when I struck and hooked her. But oh! the pangs of hauling her in, and the piteous noise she made in her terror, I shall never forget! It was thought best to kill her; and the capture was duly recorded in *Bell's Life*, under the heading "Singular Angling Incident;" yet not for a jewelled bird of paradise would I

do such a deed again. Poor little white fluttering dove!  
what a strange tragic fate to meet with, wandering so far  
away from your own watery kingdom! And her fixed  
effigies beam mild reproof upon me to this day!

## CHAPTER X.

### THE HOMESTEAD.



EVERYTHING about this Homestead—as about the Farm, of which it is the hub and nucleus—is on a large scale, a dignity reposing everywhere upon it of size and superficialities, and overlying that again a dignity, not precisely of antiquity, but of mature age. The Farm House—the dwelling—is large and rambling, respecting which the imagination, burrowing curiously into hidden basements, massive crypt-like cellars, and ponderously beamed brewery and buttery, fancies a foundation of old Edwardian days ; while the more prosaic eye,—taking correct assize of the tall stuccoed front, gray-white with many granulated coats of lime, charged formally with prim borders of a darker hue square-lining the lank sash windows, reticulated white with moulded bars more prodigal of wood than glass,—assigns the date of building to that age of stupid comfort when Hogarth with his graver was scoring the dense hide of vice, while Wesley's warning shriek, scarce heard in these obscure shades, had failed as yet to warn the cassocked parson from his pot of ale. Hard by the dwelling stands a smaller structure, the parish Church—screened from too open contact with secular concerns by a row of pollard limes—whose body of pure

gothic is garnished with ornamental features, evidently done by the same talented "hand" who raised the sash-windowed front of the Manor Farm. Within the little fane there is a fat legged gallery, where, in those sleepy days when it was new, a big base viol and a full lipped bassoon grated and boomed the *new* version of Tate and Brady, while the farmer snored and the parson drowsed; but now a slender organ feverishly awake—the cost whereof was painfully collected by subscription—awaits the white fingers of "miss" from the hall on practice nights, saints' days, and Sundays; whereas upon the dumpy steeple or across the level lawn the jackdaws "*jake*" and strut through sunshine and shade in the self same fashion as of old, disdaining the fickle ways of men.

About the farm buildings — which surround broad "bartons" on the opposite side of the dwelling-house to that occupied by the parish church—the curious in such things can certainly detect a savour of the days when England was ruled by absolute kings and priests (not all so bad as they are painted), and in the inch thick dust, crowning with venerable hoar the black oak joists, believes, in firm assurance of sound faith, some spiculæ may rest floated once by summer winds upon the self same mellow sunbeams whence great Shakespere (unnoticed, being deemed by the general of their own common clay) distilled the golden elixir of poetry for all time. Long rows of level cow-stalls, cart-horse stables high and wide, covered pigsties, sheds and stores of various uses, numerous buildings covered some with thatch others with tiles or slates, are ranged in confused order around the yards, but chiefly the great barns demand attention. One barn there is, lofty

and long as a cathedral aisle, which stood in pride of newness, but in very form as now, long days before those human jackdaws, the monks, had gotten notice to quit, within whose ample walls thousands of ripe sheaves have been stored, and thrashed by patient labour of early morning flail: the church's share of golden harvests, which holy priests first blessed and then took tithe of. Behold the massive sell—foundation of all things!—of honest and enduring home-grown oak, upon which is reared a lasting superstructure, sturdy corner posts, stout uprights, curved knees and braces, purlins and plates prolonged into the furthest darkness, and ponderous beams and loftier wind-beams crossed and inter-crossed spanning bays of gloom, all festooned with cobwebs swinging heavy with the garnered motes of unrecorded harvests. A solemn spirit whispers through the dim recesses of this vast garner, impressive as the voice which speaks from the sacred enclosure near at hand,—hither the harvests of the field are borne in the time of autumn, and yonder Death the reaper gathers in the harvests of God! As the ripe sheaves lie here piled up in dusty silence—sensible no more henceforth to cold or heat—while the departing swallow twitters farewell above the sheltering thatch, a tender retrospect recalls to mind the days of early spring, when the green blades, full of hopeful sap, quivered in the bracing gales; and so, reviewing the circling summer season—so brief now it is past—sees the footsteps of young lovers strolling along the accustomed path, brushing aside the ears of blooming wheat, sees the keen sickle flashing down the ripened grain, and catches a sad faint echo of the harvest songs. Soon the dark starry nights will come

and wintry snows lie deep upon the thatch, as the guardian owl flits softly through the shadows of the limes. Then some gray morning the great doors will open wide letting in the light, and the Thresher will begin his labour ! But the olden use of barns is almost gone, harvest of wheat has become a kind of stock-jobbing concern, and the hastily thrashed sacks of grain are become so many counters to be sharply flung down upon the ringing tables of the money-changers. We no longer house our sheaves in summer until the time of winter, finding employment, with the patient drudgery of flail and fan, for the labourer through the long season of rain and cold and snow ; but a keen demand for money has supplanted the archaic forms of home consumption and barter, and the farmer's brimming sacks must be promptly transformed into pieces of gold. The farmer's wants are now too complex to be satisfied with the simple processes of baking his own bread and spinning his own coat. Yet in the old forms of living upon food of your own production, in the payment of heriots of the best young bulls and horses, of tithes of grain in kind, and of annual tribute of wool and flax and venison to one's lords and masters, there was inherent a natural vital principle—wholesome in this wise if in no other, that all shared alike the pinch of the lean year or the joy of the fat—which we, in our constant reduction of all things to a money standard, have allowed to drop too completely out of all regard in our modern political and social economy.

In some way or somehow—a problem too complex for any attempt at present unravelment—our path of progress in matters agricultural has led us too far afield into barren

regions, and we must fetch round a returning circuit to wiser courses.

An ideal of farm life as it may be in the future, haunts one, a reflex of the serious cheer of the Saxon husbandman, enlightened with some added grace of finer culture ; certain it is that as farm life now obtains in England a jarring note, painfully audible to those who listen, and even swelling into harsh discord louder and louder on the public ear, jangles the soft and cheerful music which ought to be the hymn of life in rural spheres. This lame imitation of the habits of pinchbeck aristocracy, is it not inconsistent with the natural dignity of agriculture ?—are not our large farmers drifting away from that sturdy spirit of self-reliance which characterised the Saxon eorl, that proper model for the man of many acres ? It is to be hoped, nay it is certain, there is no setting of the sun of British agriculture. After a period of depression there will be a revival, let us hope with useful lessons learnt. A leaven of the agricultural element is a necessity in the hot ferment of our commercial polity ; and in the farmer's homely trade, wisely understood and rightly practised, there is that quality of wholesome saltiness which, through times of corruption, should preserve a nation sound.

Let us hasten to be introduced to the master of the Manor Farm, who waits within the dwelling house to welcome us. Young he is—not far from thirty, either on the sunny or the shady side—tall, and thin, but wiry, with a Norman rather than a Saxon cast about his features, and a general appearance as of a younger scion of the squirearchy, a trifle boorish, perhaps, in the matter of costume. There is



an unmistakable air of cultivation about him—of a sort ; but not quite, you think, the exact beau-ideal of that improved intelligence which reasonably might be expected in the younger large-acred agriculturists of the latter part of the nineteenth century. He has cast off utterly—as a snake casts off its slough—all trace of the smock-frock habits of his forefathers of the early Georgian era ; but it appears to be dubiously questionable (an opinion about which you hesitate and hang fire painfully) whether he has assumed the best possible—or even if he have not assumed the worst possible—new garments. There can be no hesitation, however, in at once assigning him a place in that too numerous class of Young England farmers who think it “the thing”—unless when in company with intimates of their own fraternity—to appear to be a something other than what of right they are : a petty vice they share in common with many other classes of our enlightened countrymen. A slight shade of displeasure settles on his clean-cut features as you, a stranger, ply him with questions about farming, unless, indeed, you touch only those broader agricultural topics of the day which have been publicly handled in the newspapers. Upon these you find he has very decided convictions, chiefly expressed in periods of a foreign tone, as being not his own original conclusions, but clever excerpts from the fiery eloquence of some noted chairman of market ordinaries ; the chief of his conclusions so arrived at—impressing the stamp of value on the whole—being that “Mister Gladstone” and “John Bright” are the anathematized authors of all the recent woes of farmers ! This startling sentiment he utters in no tone of honest sincerity, but with the uneasy bravado of a man

bound under an obligation to maintain and uphold a certain professional rôle. You know well what topics *will* "fetch" him, and as you lead the conversation round to shooting, racing, the gossip of the cover side, or to that slight scandal about "Miss" at the Hall (having as much truth in it as the story of Prester John) which for some time past has been chewed over by young "slips" about the neighbourhood, serving conveniently to enliven moments of vacancy, and giving them a kind of fond approximation to high life, you detect a faint irrepressible gleam of satisfaction on his face, as who should say, "I forgive your tardiness so that you allow I am capable of discussing other topics than milch cows and manure."

As we ride round the farm—for to walk over this great tract of land in any reasonable time at my disposal would be impossible—I note the general high state of cultivation, save that weeds appear to be gaining a baneful ascendancy on the arable land, while on the down lands there is an obvious deficiency of stock. "More labour needed," I mentally ejaculate, and "more capital in proportion to breadth of holding;" but as these and cognate subjects do not appear to be agreeable, I refrain from giving audible utterance to my thoughts. Yet as I note along each side of every road, unfenced from standing crops, a broad band of luxuriant grass growing unutilised and running to waste, I think of my old friend in the lonely cote on the hill above the "Hollows," and calculate what he and a dozen others such, for there is room for so many, would make out of these waste borders by spade husbandry and growth of potatoes or other hardy vegetables, leaving still a suffi-

cient comely hem of turf to the hard highway for general use and comfort. And as I see hundreds of acres of rolling down positively abandoned to almost lifeless solitude, and waving with succulent grass ungrazed by any domestic beast, converting the normally close-cropped face of these uplands into the likeness of a prairie, I wonder whether it is a scheme too chimerical to seek to draw into this channel, lying patent before one's eyes, some of those millions of capitalised earnings which now desert our shores, and get dissolved in unfructifying quest of gold and gems in Dream-lands and Deserts idle! As we jog along over only some short furlong of road I flatter myself "my rapid grasp of the subject," as an expert might say, has enabled me to sketch a sufficiently attractive programme of a speculation with prospectus headed by some such title as this—"The Foreign Live Cattle Importation and Depasturing Company, Limited," and flattering statistics setting forth in formal and convincing array the following facts, "that in Spain, America, and the Netherlands, so many thousands of young lean Live Cattle may be purchased annually at a mere nominal cost, that the cost per head of Transit will be only so much, that they can be Depastured upon the Downs of Wessex and elsewhere in England under the charge of carefully selected Herd-boys for almost nothing, and that having attained a certain pitch of Condition they can be Re-sold to enterprising Butchers, Graziers, and others, either for immediate slaughter or for further fattening, at a clear profit of so much per head, showing on the capital of the company, after deducting working expenses a clear profit of twenty per cent. per annum; not to mention collateral advantages in manuring Down Land, and

the Patriotic Glory of increasing the Meat Supply of this Great Kingdom ! ”

I even venture to hint the nature of my thoughts on these subjects to my companion ; and further proceed boldly to state my own opinion and to ask for his upon the speculative theory of the growth of weeds, and on the question of the permanent improvement of land, but get for answer, more in looks than words, a plain intimation that he thinks me pragmatistical and hare-brained ; nevertheless, I adhere to my ideas as having some reason in them.

Firstly, that whereas weeds grow spontaneously, certain species most freely on certain lands, proving the natural affinity of certain plant-growths for certain soils, it might be worth our while by aid of chemistry and practical experiment to discover, if possible, the secret of this, and to ascertain what straw crops, and whether any sown or planted crops, or whether only permanent pasture, and which grasses or herbs under that head, were most congenial to certain soils, or most likely to grow naturally, or rather kindly, after the manner of weeds, and so by ceasing to grow difficult and uncongenial crops, and by cultivating only such as would grow most easily, to achieve the double good of lessening the cost of production while augmenting the quality and quantity of the produce.

Secondly, that whereas, in the cultivation of arable land, the desideratum is to bring it into that excellent friable condition called “tilth,” and that whereas the chief difficulty and cost of arable husbandry is to combat and prevent the tendency of arable land in tilth more or less perfect to degenerate and fall back again, as it were, and

so to become obdurate again, and irresponsible to the bountiful fertilising action of nature, which, if only the husbandman will keep his soil receptive, goes on night and day without trouble or expense to him, might not some outlay be usefully incurred of capital to be sunk or invested in the land, and to be looked upon as permanent improvement (under due arrangements between landlord and tenant, where existing conditions rendered such mutual arrangements necessary) for the purpose of accurately gauging the constituent qualities and capacities of soils, and for the subsequent application of some cheap chemistry—as of lime upon clay—that should in future spare too hard labour of the plough and of roller and other implements thereafter; leaving the cultivator thenceforth free both in time and pocket to follow up further beneficial refinements of cultivation. In short, to improve the cultivation of our English arable fields up towards, and where soil and circumstances favour such a process quite up to, a Garden standard, the necessary capital or ready money being the only one thing needful to pay for the initiatory work, the ultimate profit upon the outlay being a sure thing; but whether profitable or not profitable, this, I think, may be accepted as truth,—nay, I claim for it not only the weight of truth but the force of axiomatical truth, that it is cheaper, relatively easier, and more profitable all round to raise a Garden crop than it is to raise a Field crop. In short, if, as a British Farmer, I must lose money by my useful avocations, let me lose it in the best manner! But this question of our Farming being a losing concern, though I admit it as a moot point worthy to receive every consideration that can be demanded for it, I by no means

concede as a matter proven ; believing rather that our farming under due conditions of soil, capital, and skill will ever be profitable ; that there is no profit so certain as the profit derivable from land ; that the loss to be deducted for bad seasons (and which ought never, even in the fattest times, to be left unreckoned, as it commonly is) is coverable, or to be written off in the long run, by a very low annual per-centage, or rebate, from profits ; and that the competition of the foreigner is a thing to be met by growing forty bushels where he grows twenty, and that, should he seek to equal our rate of production, and to grow his forty bushels where we grow our forty bushels—a thing he certainly has the chance of doing, and which he may succeed in doing, all things proving favourable, in the course of the next century or two—he will find the necessary increased cost of production a heavier one in proportion than we do, and so, therefore, we shall always *at our best* beat him, and still *at his very best* continue to beat him, at least, if by no other quantity, still, by the cost of transit across the ocean.

And thirdly, that whereas, to enable these things and such as these to be done in our country, for the benefit of the community, certain laws, to be framed always by enlightened men, would need to be passed ; and whereas certain other laws, framed by men not so enlightened (or whose light, bright enough once, has now come to be—by an inevitable process common to human institutions—somewhat dim), and long ago passed, would need to be repealed ; therefore the necessary legislative machinery should be forthwith arranged and put in motion, so as to afford, for the promotion of these great and benevolent

national concerns, equal facilities in freedom for outlay of energy, skill, and capital, as now are afforded for the quest of gems in deserts idle ; and further, emphatically to prevent the present action of lawyers—not those great ones who make laws, and who may be distinguished as *law-givers*, but only those *law-yers* who spill ink on parchment—so that they should be bidden to leave the intelligent cultivator to the free exercise of his own proper business, they exercising with equal freedom theirs : which might reasonably consist, in one direction, for instance, in draughting such a simple agreement as should prevent, under pain of legal penalties, the parties thereto, being owner on the one part and tenant on the other part of certain land, from ultimately damaging the estate the one of the other.

And so I proceeded further to state, that under such improved conditions as these I had hinted at, preliminarily established, if due and careful survey of all Farm Lands were made, it might well be conceded that some such existing conditions and possible improvements as these following would be discovered and suggested ;—One : certain hard, cold clay, or poor and barren soils, now subjected annually to the recurring thankless labours of the plough, by sweating tenant for the false profit of rent-receiving landlord, under wooden conditions and blind restrictions of the ink-upon-parchment-spillers, of a nature so ungenial as that upon them no remunerative improvement as farm lands could by any reasonable process be made,—to be at once released from any and all of the conditions of farm lands, and so restored to their proper natural function of wood-land, or so called waste : in that capacity having a beauty and profit of their own,

as all things natural have, and doing harm to no man ;—two : certain other good soils now in the condition of slightly profitable down or pasture,—to be with advantage turned into the more suitable condition of greatly profitable arable ; while, *vice versa*, some not so good soils now in the condition of slightly profitable arable, to be with advantage turned into the more suitable condition of pasture or meadow land ;—and, three, upon all descriptions of land—not uniformly, but here and there, more or less—that arch-enemy to fruitfulness, stagnant, sour, or superabundant water, chiefly lodged in the sub-soil, to be, whenever or wherever so found, forthwith drained away, and hastened on through proper courses to the sea ; causing the rivers to smile, and the seas to keep healthy, and returning again some day in fertilising showers.

“ Ah ! ” I cried, “ if, out of all our wasted millions, only those loans which have left our bleeding shores for the sole end that for yet another ten or for yet another twenty years greasy Pachas and pasty Houris might continue to disport themselves, had been retained at home, and from time to time judiciously and wisely expended, in the manner I have indicated, upon our own soil, is it not fair to conclude that not one of the Queen’s subjects could by any possibility be at the present moment worse off ?—and is it not, on the contrary, a reasonable inference that the whole body of our Commonwealth would be at the present moment better off ?—nay, not only at the present moment richer, but, as the possessors of a reversionary interest, doubly rich ; with our successors securely dowered as the beneficiary heirs of funded fertility ! ”

On the question of summer fallowing I now discover my



conductor to be a stickler for old custom, and I find it hard to go against him, entertaining as I do such profound respect for precedent in so ancient and instinctive a science as that of agriculture ; and yet upon this point I was fain to tell him I supported the spirit rather than the letter of old practice. "Our forefathers," said I, "had more leisure, and fewer mouths to feed upon a given acreage than we have ; but had they been placed under similar conditions to our own I believe they would have kept their land clean by constant cultivation rather than by the wasteful process of fallowing. I have seen, sir," I proceeded, "fallows with a crop of weeds upon them sufficient covert for a fox, that might have screened a red-deer, and certainly would have hidden a roebuck, had such been there to roam across them ! And between that foulest state and what those fallows should be, there are many degrees of ill-condition, examples of which are common enough to be seen. I never yet met with one who could give a logical scientific definition of the nature and effect of the rest stated to be enjoyed by land while being fallowed ; and, indeed"—here growing warm I raised my voice—"my firm conviction is that the theory of fallowing is a pestilent error, once comparatively harmless under conditions of leisure and abundance, but now, under our present totally different conditions, a boon only to the ignorant and lazy—a roundabout way of robbing the country of one-fourth of its food-producing power, and a crowning instance of the stupidity of the ink-upon-parchment-spillers, by whose idle iterations this foolish error is invested with an appearance of respectability, and its be-mused supporters kept in countenance ! I once knew," I added, "an old experienced agriculturist

in Norfolk who farmed in greater part his own land, and therefore was in a position of comparative independence, who, being endowed with an active, inquisitive intellect, had the courage to throw off the trammels of a worn-out tradition, and not only did he farm highly at a time when to farm highly was a notable thing, but he came at length to the determination never to allow a single acre of his land to lie idle for a single day; so that every acre of it was ever to be found in one or other of three active conditions—growing a crop, being prepared for a crop, or being cleaned up after a crop: the latter process when, after the earlier years, he had got it all into good tilth, not long about. In his case," I added, "the no-fallow system answered remarkably well, and by it he accumulated wealth. A common saying of his, arrogant and boastful enough, as his sayings were wont to be, was, 'Farmers don't know their own business; I can always grow four good crops while a farmer grows three bad ones!'"

"That," remarked the tenant of Manor Farm, "was caddish of the old fellow; besides, he 'd no conditions, no lease!"

"Quite right," I rejoined. "I see you appreciate correctly *one* of the burdens on land!"

And so, with interchange of argument and speculation, but chiefly with utterance of comment and monologue, the time passed on until our horses' heads veered homeward again; and soon we pulled up, dismounting at the back of the Homestead.

Here a number of workshops are located—the wheelwright's, where a rough artisan, a better-class sort of

labourer, is employed repairing a cart; the blacksmith's, with forge aglow, ready for the coming of the village smith to do some jobs of "shoeing," one of the regular men upon the farm waiting to take charge of the bellows and assist in doing the work; the hurdle-maker's, with necessary stock of poles and hazel wands near by, where another superior labourer handles a light keen hatchet as deftly as ever could the spryest shipwright in Portsmouth dock-yard—had he lived a thousand years ago, he might have marched with King Alfred and have played fierce havoc among the Danes! These various shops prove the extensive nature of the operations carried on upon this large farm, and also that a wise economy pervades the arrangements. These artisan-labourers, who are numbered among the best of the regular farm hands, receive, I find, twelve shillings a week wages.

At this moment my conductor is called away on some affair of business, and I saunter on alone. Ah! there he is at last, with his honest face protruding through the open upper-space of the wide halved door, gazing out upon the quiet fields, a hunter being summered in a cool box after the most approved fashion; and so the open question of hunter or no hunter being kept by the farmer is set at rest, in this case at least, by ocular demonstration. What a bridlesome that head is!—long, bony, and full of character; bold pricked ears, ample forehead, eyes where now lie asleep the latent fires, muzzle fine, and lips clean and elastic, though pendulous now; and how well set on the head is too! with full gullet joined to lean neck by a graceful curve—altogether, a nag not to be purchased under three figures, I mentally wager before seeing his legs.

As I approach him the elegant muzzle is gently tossed, and the lips purse up into sardonic wrinkles with Houyhnhnm suspicion of a biped stranger ; but almost instantly I win his kindest recognition—for no animal so instinctively “cottons” to certain men as does a horse, especially if he be a well-bred one. Show me the man with whom a thoroughbred horse falls in love at first sight, and I will assign to him certain mental qualities—not of the highest, perhaps, but at least of the chivalrous order. It is not nice to handle a man’s steed in his absence, so I wait until afterwards, when I have an opportunity of entering Houyhnhnm’s box in company with his owner, and then I discover that my unoffered wager would have been a safe one ; I find the horse’s legs showing no sign of over-work, with large flat joints and back sinews (as critical fingers are passed along them) cool as bars of steel. As you clip the tough muscles of his neck, cast your eye along his back and mark how stout of bone, braced and ribbed like the inverted keel of a ship ; admire his arched loins, good leverage wherewith to top a rasper, even when middle-aged “fifteen stone” is up, and confess that he is all over a good horse—fit and well, one to gallop for a man’s life ! This gallant chestnut is a genuine weight carrier, clever with hounds over any part of Wessex—turf or clay ; and long may he and his courteous owner “go” together—for in answer to a tentative remark, the quiet reply is, “he is *not* for sale.”

Through the hurdle-maker’s yard, swinging open a wide five-barred gate hung to the gnarled stem of a living tree, I saunter solitarily down the front of a long range of open cart-sheds, which are shaded by tall ash trees, the chosen

home of a busy population of sparrows. Within the hollow boles of some of the trees the starlings breed, choosing secure holes for ingress and egress, while the entire avenue, with the adjoining yards, appears to be visited continually by feathered friends from the neighbouring fields and coppices — chaffinches, linnets, yellow-hammers, corn buntings—appearing almost as domesticated in their habits as the original settlers, and glad to vary their country diet of wild seeds and insects with dainty dole of scattered grain about the homestead, enlivened by added zest of chirping gossip. So round a quiet corner, steering one's way carefully among great mores and stools of felled trees, amid disused ploughs, rusty iron tackle, and all sorts of rustic lumber half concealed by a rank growth of flowering hemlock and nettles, a quiet region is entered, remote and silent, where hurrying footstep seldom penetrates nor sun ever shines, but blinking cosily upon the bright aspect of populous stalls and sheds here casts a deeper and a cooler shade. Here ponderous wheels, destined to revolve no more, recline in shady corners, and there huge waggons, some with names of half-forgotten owners painted upon them, whose labours are all done and voyages all over, stand neglected and forlorn under dank thatch, resigned to slow decay. Into this wilderness, lying at the back of the busy farmyard world, rustic children, knowing nought of things beyond are afraid to venture, and should they by rare chance steal into this strange region, they feel awed by a sense of doubtful adventure, — as the red-haired Vikings may have felt in the dim ages, on casting loose the warp that bound them to pleasant Juteland.

See, here comes such an urchin, with uncertain step and

blue inquiring eyes, whose frizzly flaxen poll may have felt the heat of ten short summers, boldly urging his solitary way in search of adventures, discovery of birds' nests, or what not. The little rascal looks scared as he catches sight of a strange figure, but all his manhood evidently swells up at the first hint of danger. Pity that before ten more years have rolled over his head all the adventurous energy will have been drilled and pressed out of him, or if not, then worse. Woe betide such a youth as this labourer's child bids fair to make if by any slight trespass across conventional boundaries he comes to earn the dull regards of keeper or policeman, from doubtful bad to certain worse he will surely go if the devil within him once gets roused !

"Holloa, you there !" I hear a high-pitched voice exclaim in semi-bantering tone, and little Flaxen-hair disappears in a moment ; it is the tall tenant of Manor Farm who has scared him away. "That boy'll come to the gallows, as sure as his name's Dick," he said, laughing, "there never was such a little rascal for getting into mischief."

On making some indifferent reply, I scrutinized the young farmer's face, and satisfied myself he would be more likely to treat his horse with proper kindness than he would a labourer ; not from any want of natural kindliness of heart—he was brimming full of that—but because there was a want of that higher principle which might have led him along the hard path of duty, and because he had no notion of bestowing kindness where self-interest had ceased to bestow its insidious approval. I was alarmed to find, on discussing the subject, what a bitter feeling had taken entire possession of the farmer's heart about the labourers. Utterly

gone is that friendly interchange of sympathy which used to be the bond of union between master and man, and though at bottom it was but selfishness in disguise on the one hand, and servile gratitude for favours to come on the other, yet was there such sweet glamour thrown over it by pleasant flattery of human weakness, we mourn for it still as something lovely and almost holy. The farmer's argument chiefly took the form that the labourers, in recent strikes had shown such want of gratitude ; he felt sore as if Houyhnhnm had kicked him in the stable. "After *all* we've done for 'em!" said he. Any argument founded on recognition of the duty the strong and well-informed owe to the weak and ignorant, was clearly fore-doomed to fierce resentment ; and the mild suggestion, that possibly, in the hands of an adroit advocate, the tables might be turned on the score of gratitude, scarcely met with a better fate ; the only consolation, I found, that I could offer, was evolved from the reflection that things were in a state of transition, and that we must endeavour to bear the inevitable shocks arising from the breaking up of the old, in hopes that the new may bring us something better.

"They're a bad lot!" said Manor-Farm, smiting his comely gaitered leg with a supple switch ; and I felt irresistibly drawn towards him. Could he but have lived in the palmy days of the fat-legged gallery, how all his hinds would have worshipped him ; had he gone out to Virginia in those early Georgian days, he would have owned the sleekest slaves in the colony, have taken a kindly pride in them, and have heard, with softened heart, the nigger banjos twanging melodies in his honour ! He cannot perceive that the same spirit which animates his breast is

beginning to stir in the hearts of the labourers. Men, having passed a certain stage, are always yearning to be master of something, as little Flaxen-hair yearned after birds' nests, and as the northern Vandals, hirsute and lean, hankered after the plunder of imperial Rome. It is the wisest mariner who presages the tempest, and commands the incredulous sailors to trim the ship in time; the tempests of the sky the greatest, wisest man cannot control, but he can guide and bend the passions and impulses of his fellow-men. Who shall be the greatest, wisest statesman to seize in time our helm of state and avert the coming storm?

My kindly host had come round the back of the home-stead to call me in, for he had had, as he explained, "some business with a fellow," that was now despatched, and he was waiting for us to join him to smoke a cigar together.

It was the wine merchant. A showy dog-cart, horsed by a high-bred "weed," and in charge of a young man—half clerk half groom—waited in a shady corner of the avenue, while the owner, a stout bold-faced gentleman, arrayed in ample diaphanous dust-coat, with a curly-brimmed white hat upon his head, and resplendent rings upon his snowy fingers, stood swelling upon the lawn. He tilted up his glorious hat with effusive politeness on introduction to me, and we entered the farmer's snuggerly together. The talk naturally fell upon wine, and I was vexed to observe that Manor-Farm condescended to affect a lisping tone and to dawdle in a hesitating manner with a briar-root pipe as if he were on parade before Mr. Diaphanous. He was but a pigeon in the soft talons of this trained hawk



—and he had paid, I found, a long price for some blended stuff adroitly pushed down his throat by aid of slippery flow of pompous verbiage.

“Let the *squire* taste some of that ‘Seventy-four’ I sold you three years ago, sir!” cried Mr. Diaphanous in his most insinuating tone. “I see he has not yet lighted a cigar, and ’tis an expletived crime for a gentleman to drink *high-class* port when he’s smoking!”

My excuses being unavailing, a bottle of the treasured nectar was introduced; and then, as in duty bound, I sipped a glass leisurely, which was followed, in a still more leisured manner, by a second. Finding the wine to be high-priced trash, and sitting there between vendor and purchaser, both hanging upon my verdict, and both prepared to dispute it if other than favourable, I felt myself placed in a slight dilemma. Therefore, closing my lips firmly so that nothing more intelligible than an interjection could by any possibility escape them, I threw my eyes towards the ceiling in an impressive manner, and proceeded to assume the placid air of a connoisseur, who having met with something curious, determines to submit it to the tribunal of his inner consciousness. I thus travelled mentally further and further “inner”-wards until lost in dreamland;—then, awaking with a sigh, I lighted a cigar! The little ruse succeeded admirably, for both my companions, as I read in their countenances, interpreted the pantomime each after his own heart. The one, I foresaw, would quote my opinion to his friends as emphatic approval; the other to his customers (of a sort) as a crucial ordeal triumphantly passed! The wine merchant I really succeeded in generally

bamboozling ;—he took me to be a keen hand, yet too much of a gentleman to peach, and so sought further confidences ; but I refused to gratify the rascal. An anecdote or two had been related, and some allusion had been made in the course of our conversation to public companies. I therefore begged to be allowed to tell the following story :—

“In a Country well-known to me,” I said, “having travelled there in my youth a good deal, a great number of the people live on ship-board. They live in that way because they have no choice in the matter, and must either live on ship-board or not live at all ; but as only one kind of ship, built of a particular material, the utmost possible production of which is extremely limited, can float upon those waters, and as, in addition to their intrinsic value, the mere fact of being owner of these ships—even one only—confers a variety of state privileges, the position of shipowner is much coveted by the natives. So keen among them has the competition become for the possession of ships that the price is absurdly inflated, so that none but the highest and wealthiest can enter the market with any chance of success, and thus a great Ship-owner class has become established in that country, endowed with all these valuable privileges, and wielding, as you may well suppose—in a great measure through the inherent weakness of frail human nature, which is the same in all countries—tremendous and almost irresponsible power.

“You may think it incredible, but it is true, I assure you, that a boat-owner is entitled to be called ‘magistrate,’ and to exercise judicial functions, not because of his fitness

for such responsible office, but simply because he *is a Boat-owner*. The laws of that country are the most puzzling and complicated of any laws in the world, inso-much that their learned men, called Big-wigs, who spend all their lives in the study of the law, are constantly disputing over the various interpretations ; yet no sooner does some stripling, however ignorant or stupid he may be, become a Boat-owner, than he is forthwith hoisted on to the Bench to interpret and administer the Law. Well, now, the shuffling of the market and the long lapse of time having placed the ownership of all the national ships and boats in the hands of the high-privileged class, they are gotten to be too proud and are much too delicately nurtured to manage their own property ; consequently another class of the natives, called Navigators, devote themselves solely to the trade of managing the national ships for the high-privileged Ship-owners, at which business they are very skilful ;—indeed, it may be said that their Navigators are the most expert navigators, and their Ship-owners the proudest ship-owners of any on the face of the earth !

“ Now—would you believe it ?—that by *such* Ship-owners and by *such* Navigators one of the grossest and most fatuous acts of stupidity in the management—or rather mis-management—of their Ships is constantly repeated under the influence of a delusion they call ‘ Custom ;’ yet, as I will show you in a moment, it is so ! Their usual system, long established and sanctioned by the usage of ages, is for the two classes—the Owners and the Navigators—to form themselves into companies or corporations for the proper management and working of the precious national Ships, and for the benefit and welfare of the people generally. We will say,

for the sake of illustration, that one Owner agrees with one Navigator for the management of one Ship. The usual course of proceeding is thus : the two contracting parties meet and solemnly strike their hands upon a dressed sheep's-skin covered over with cabalistic characters, and call upon their gods to witness the act ; then certain fees are paid to the Ink-spillers for writing the cabalistic characters, and so the contracting parties are bound together for a term of years. The method of writing those cabalistic characters is known only to the Ink-spillers, and the form of the sheep's-skin and all appertaining to it is so antiquated, that the process has ceased to be, as you may well suppose, intelligible to the common people. But this much is certain—and indeed we must conclude these natives to be mad if it were not so—the greatest care is taken by the stipulations on the sheep's-skin that the national Ships, so precious, so scarce, and so useful, shall be preserved in the utmost state of efficiency. “ But the curious fact remains to be told which justifies what I said just now. The Navigator, having got his Ship, for a time manages it in the most approved fashion, so that it really is a treat, to any traveller who knows what a ship is, to see how clean and taut he will keep the hull and the rigging both standing and running ; but after a time he gets careless, lets everything go back and get out of condition, and—what do you think he does ?—why, after a certain lapse of time, upon a signal given, he rushes down into the hold, cuts a hole in the bottom of his vessel, and SCUTTLES HER ;—as I am a traveller and a sinner ! ”

“ The scoundrel ! ” roars Manor-Farm.

"I can't believe it, expletive if I can!" exclaims Mr. Diaphanous.

"It is true, gentlemen, on my honour," I reply. "The practice is universal. It is contrary, no doubt, to the letter of the cabalistic characters; but so strong has custom become, and so feeble really are the Ink-spillers, spite of all their boasted strength and learning, that this astounding waste of national resources is suffered continually. The number of their precious national Ships scuttled in that way in the run of, say, a year, and the loss entailed upon the Commonwealth in getting them up again, and in putting them once more into a fit condition to sail, is so enormous the natives never attempt to calculate it! Why, gentlemen, I have seen fine old Ships upon the waters of that country that have been scuttled in that suicidal manner no less than twenty times!"

"But why don't the Owners prosecute the Navigators for such criminal waste?" asks Manor-Farm.

"For two reasons," I explain. "First, the cost of prosecution (which, in that curious country, is not regulated according to the justice of your cause) is too enormous; and secondly, there is such inextricable confusion of laws, statutes, and customs that no one, however clever, can foresee with the slightest degree of certainty what may be the result of intermeddling with them. I might add a third reason—which some of the natives are wicked enough to assign—that the Ink-spillers are not averse to the state of legal confusion, seeing it has a direct and constant tendency to put fees into their pockets! This, however, you need not believe unless you like. Certain it is, that, up

to the time of my last journey to that country, the natives had failed to discover any efficient remedy for this strange and wasteful abuse!"

"Hum!" muttered Mr. Diaphanous, "a pretty fable, truly!"

An invitation to a rubber I declined, and soon found myself bowling quietly away along a distant lonely road.

"What a worthy fellow," I mused, "is Manor-Farm—so full of generous instincts! How could we bear to miss him, and his class? And wine, too. Wine was once made in some parts of Britain by the early monks;—what *could* it have been like? I should really like to see a wine-press established at Manor Farm. Meantime, commend me to sound cider or to honest 'home-brewed,' in preference to the 'forty-seven port' of Mr. Diaphanous!"

At this moment I heard the voice of that respectable wine merchant calling after me, so, looking round, I allowed him, whipping up his thoroughbred "weed" at a furious pace, to overtake me.

"What the expletive, Squire, *was* the meaning of that story of yours?" he gasped. "I sha'n't sleep to-night unless you tell me. I know you've some meaning in it, some fling about farming and leases—for *ships* read *land*, hey?"

"Do you think so, Mr. Diaphanous?" said I.

"Yes, I do," said he.

"Then I have nothing more to say," said I.

## CHAPTER XI.

### PLOTS—OF LAND.



ON an Isle within an Island, by the rocky shore of a narrow sea, lies a ruined castle. Ages ago the castle stood in splendour, lording it, from the tall summit of a chalky cliff, over the straw-thatched hovels herded at its foot ; casting an eye of proud possession over field and forest spreading far inland, and frowning defiance even to the roaring sea, whose yeasty rage expended upon frail ships from Languedoc and Cadiz, did but throw up legal tribute of wreck to the lords of that strong place.

And ages before that time, when the high hill stood bare, the wandering Celt seized upon it as a place of vantage ; and after him the stronger Gaul ; following whom the sturdy Saxon, yearning with earth-hunger, made a stronghold there ; while the fierce Danes vainly dashed their war-ships on the iron coast below ; and all through the changing years of human history the solid hill still frowned or smiled upon the weltering sea—the rooted and the restless, they alone immutable !

And whomsoever in the days of its splendour, when the conquering Norman ruled in England, came to be Constable of that strong castle, standing in a high place and looking down upon humbler fellow-men, scarce owned by the great

lord to be such, held in his mailed hand issue of life and death, and by crooking of a finger could assemble, from the straw-thatched hovels herded at his castle's foot, a small jury of honest burgesses, and straightway from yon dark beam of granite, jutting out from the sheer abyss of pitiless stone, some wretch would dangle ; about whose tragic end no further question could be asked by any mortal, he being done to death by due process of law.

And there was feasting, too, at the castle in those days, rights of vert and venison in many a distant chace, free warren round about, chiminage, assize of beer, and toll from nets of toiling fishermen, falcons from the forest, and royal monsters—grampuses, sturgeons, porpoises from the deep ; royalties and appropriated first fruits, and tithes of bere and corn and salt, and many a tun of red Gascon wine rolling up from the beach, all for the great lord of the strong castle ; except spare morsels thrown by gracious privilege to the honest burgesses, glad on such terms to do suit and service to the lord, receiving back as a gift, with meekness, a portion of what they themselves had paid to him as a right, with trembling, even so they might keep their necks out of the pillory and the family pot boiling : which, indeed, is primest duty of every honest man, who not being born in a high place, yet humbly desires to live well and die a natural death ; and, furthermore, by annual payment of cheap horse-shoes (the iron entering not into their souls) as quit-rent to the great lord, glad exceedingly to preserve each one a snug roof over his head, as shelter for wife and children and the family pot, and as a pitiful screen for his own meek face from constant scornful spitting of the free salt sea.



So long as everything was done by law and in due order with gravity of Outer Courts and secrecy of Inner Courts, with formal aid and help of burgesses and barons, mayors and deputies and bailiffs, and with the safe blessing of Holy Church, to which the great lord was ever a friend and patron, the mighty Constable waxing fat with fines and royalties, the burgesses not lean by aid of doles and privileges, patient serfs and villanes and dumb oxen ploughing and sowing that their lords might reap ; all of them fenced about by royal grant and warrant, free to laugh at any higher law (if such, indeed, there were, so they in their infatuation asked) beyond or above the precincts of their own strong Isle, little recked the jovial lord and his retainers how ought else in the world might wag ; nor even wasted a thought of pity upon fallow prisoners down below, rotting away their weary lives in the castle dungeons.

Not because they were malefactors justly condemned for fearful crimes were these fallow-faced creatures kept prisoned in the dungeons, laden with chains and fastened by iron staples to relentless walls ; but because, perchance, one of them was once for a brief sunshiny day a hero in arms, the idol of the people, now by cruel down-turn of Fortune's wheel for long years of worse than night a rebel on bare knees, the tyrant in power meanwhile conveniently disabusing the fond public ear, or secretly dallying with some astute continental cousin for ransom in mercenary gold ; or because, perchance, another one, endowed by all bounteous heaven with too active brain, is unbending possessor of some fatal glimpse of delicate family or state affairs, who, if brought to other than most secret trial, might utter burning words to be bruited abroad even by the frank

squalling of the sea, and for whom, if damp and fasting fail to hasten seeming natural decay, there may presently be sharp stab of poinard flashed suddenly from hiding cloak, or subtler fever of insidious poison.

Other prisoners there were in those days within the castle who daily sat at meat with the black-browed Constable, fair ladies and gentle men, whose only crime was being born too near to coat-armour greatness, allowed a specious liberty, surrounded by fair show of servile smiles, but hourly smitten in tender heart by lynx-eyed glances more grievous thus to be borne unceasingly than weal of scourge upon outer skin.

As for felons within the limits of the Isle there was judgment for them at the Outer Courts—sometimes of fire, water, or battle—fire less fierce, water more ponderous, battle not to the hilt if the victim could afford it ; but for any wicked man who killed a royal deer, short shrift and a nimble rope across the projecting stone !

And so the years rolled onward from the early time of mists down through the centuries with slow progression towards the brighter day, and slower progress still of human effort, while ever the Castle stood aloft in power unshaken. The meaner sort, from generation to generation, gazing upon this power with gathered awe upon their souls of dark tradition and present sense of frowning battlements, deemed it a part of nature's scheme, immutable as the solid rocks and weltering waves. The great Lords of the Castle, from generation to generation, cased in glittering mail or wrapped in glossy silk, by help of feud or intrigue or light revelry whittling away their tale of years, and worshipped by the

meaner sort, they also deemed their state a part of nature's scheme, and ramparts fathom-thick proof as the living rock. Some whispering sighs the great lords heard with careless ear, and some wild shrieks they stifled with mailed hand ; but ever as the years rolled on there came that distant moaning sound which careless ear must hear and no mailed hand might drown, as of a voice upon the sea and the muttering of a rising storm !

All through these ages, kings arose, made wars and died, their names enrolled in history ; great lords lived their lives and died, to live again in blazoned marble ; priests fulminated dogmas, raised aisles of fretted stone, and waved before men's eyes the keys of heaven, gaining a saintly record in the calendar ; but the people only bled for kings, toiled for nobles, knelt to priests—in silence : no praises sung, no record kept—though love and joy and hope, thank God, were theirs in part—rising where their fathers fell, and falling in their turn to mingle with common dust ;—all through this strange sad roll of years none but a Baron could be great, none holy save the Priest. Yet through all this lengthened web of human history woven by the ever-weaving loom of time, cutting the dark under-woof of thankless service of the many, and golden overlay of broidery of the few, there ran ever an unbroken silver warp of deference to public opinion under guise of law, abused by power and wrenched by artifice it might be, but ever there shining through surrounding darkness in this castled Isle.

But as the years rolled on, and the over-brooding vault of Heaven lifted and waxed brighter, men's hearts beat bolder, quickened by pulsation of livelier vitality, and their

eyes were opened and their minds informed with some sense of the dignity of manhood and the value of life, so that the sound of the coming storm arose and drew nearer, as the plebian masses possessed by the new spirit of their leaders heaved and surged like the troubled sea ; for so only could the voice of humanity make itself heard at the gates of the Castle, where the haughty trembled in secret, yet hardened obdurate hearts and dulled informing senses with the opiate of delusive hopes. Then arose from the ranks of the people a broad visaged Man, square-jawed and iron-handed, whose bright eyes looked far ahead into the lustre of the coming years, and dwelt with scorn upon what was evil in the past—as if Nature herself had girded him with her own coat-armour, and dubbed him king by right divine—who strode forth against this obdurate Castle, which had lorded it through the ages from the summit of a rock, and with one blow of his iron hand smote wide its massive gates, no more to frown defiance on rash intruders ; dashed in the stony crown of that cruel dungeon, so long the hidden den of dire oppression ; and toppled down those lordly towers and bastions fathom-thick, for weary centuries the chosen home and stronghold of callous selfishness, class privilege, and overweening pride !

The heroic method of removing obstacles (to human progress) by sudden hoist of gunpowder is more to be honoured in an engineering than in a moral sense. But the actual work of Oliver (his name used figuratively) at Corfe Castle—divested of all haze or halo of romance—offers to the inquiring eye, even at the present day, a remarkable spectacle fraught with curious suggestion. The brave old towers, though, after siege, cruelly under-

mined and blasted, so that their fragments should have shot skyward and thence descending have strewed the earth, refused to be thus annihilated, and though dismantled and rent, such is the strength and cohesive power hardened by time of the cement with which they are built, they still stand and lean, in a picturesque disorder, refusing to fall, and bearing up manfully against the effects of violence and decay, just as, in a semi-ruined condition, the vain efforts of the parliamentary agents left them! About and around the colossal fragments, too, there clings an adumbration of female heroism, so that when holiday rambles rest awhile upon the hill, beneath the peaceful sunshine of our day, they see amidst the picturesque ruins a shining presence as of a brave lady whose virtues might gild any cause: and this is the glory of our English parties, sects, and creeds, that none can (or will) truly say of another, anathema! This, however, points to a side issue beyond the present purpose. The really valuable and curious spectacle presented by these remarkable ruins is this, that to the outer eye they offer the exact ponderable image of a moral truth, which should ever be present to the mind's eye of the reformer, suggesting the vanity of hoping by sudden shock of violent revolution to compass complete substitution of new lamps for old.

In England, treading as we do in all things the tracks worn in lengthening procession by the footsteps of our ancestors, we are, perforce, perpetual heirs of tradition, and in rural affairs, in nothing is this truth more palpably manifested than in the universal feeling of reverence for Game and Game laws. The average country gentleman, without ever having once given five minutes' serious con-

sideration to the matter, supports in every customary way the assumption that game is paramount, and game laws intrinsically the most righteous of all enactments; while the average country clown inherits at once a tantalizing sense of game being his forbidden fruit, with a boding dread of swift and certain punishment awaiting the slightest breach of cruel game laws. His very being is environed and moulded by this palpable survival of the dour spirit of old forest days and forest laws. Gamekeepers and policemen are ever lying in wait to trip him up, and, the latter especially, do so on very slight provocation.

What the average country parson thinks upon this matter it is hard to tell;—when he steps somewhat beyond his clerical rôle, and assumes the character of a "*squarson*," or of an ordinary country gentleman, he is generally a pronounced game-preservee; but in the pulpit he eschews the subject. I have heard thousands of village sermons, but never yet heard one specifically about the Game Laws. And yet the parson's neighbour, the squire, is constantly occupied at Petty and Quarter Sessions inflicting penalties upon labourers—the parson's own flock—for breach of these same laws. Imagine an epidemic of stealing (for instance) developing so that there should be in one year, throughout a country side, thousands of trials and thousands of convictions, almost all of one class of men, for breach of the laws against that one crime—how the pulpits would wax eloquent! Why then this reticence about poaching? There must surely be some conflict between the Game law and the Moral law under burden of which the Teacher is silent.

But the broken survival of forest laws in the Statute

Book is as nothing compared to the vitality of the old forest-law *spirit* palpably apparent in rural society ; and no true estimate of the effect of our customs and laws respecting game, upon the general well-being of the labouring and kindred classes, can be formed without taking careful account of what may be termed the extra-judicable prejudice. There is scarcely a step or action that one can take in any direction upon any matter in the country, but that he runs a risk of coming in contact, in some way or other, either with the Game *law* or the Game *prejudice*. Some grave debate may be in progress at a meeting of the Board of Guardians touching a question of out-door relief, to which the usual speakers have contributed the usual arguments, when some silent man of duller brain than ordinary, stammers out a broken sentence—"It might interfere with the Game!"—and immediately the dull man carries the decision (the wrong way), a look of pregnant meaning glancing round the awe-struck table. A labourer applies to a farmer for employment, the latter tells the man to call to-morrow, and in the meantime sees a neighbour who says, the man is a capital handy hard-working labourer, but "b'lieve there was something, somewhere, somehow, about rabbiting ;"—the labourer calls "to-morrow," and is assured by the farmer, looking gravely up at the sky with a pre-occupied air, that he has been thinking it over, "and there's no hoeing ready yet, and I shall let the reaping to Thomas Biggin and the old lot." As for the convicted poacher, even for a first offence, he is an outlaw, and had far better have committed perjury : if he wishes for friendship or even fellowship he must seek it amongst the outcasts, and thenceforth there is a dangerous temptation

weighing upon the wretch to rattle down the facile road ! The amount of suspicion engendered between the game-keepers and the labourers, and the attrition resulting from the antagonistic action of their proper avocations, is really monstrous, but acquiesced in by rural populations as air or earth, or water is; while to a really impartial close observer dwelling in the midst of such things (*rara avis* as such an one must be!) it assumes the aspect of a loathsome social disease ! The eye of the "keeper" is constantly upon the labourer, noting his most innocent actions through a jaundiced medium which transforms every poor hard-working fellow into a poacher *in esse* or *in posse*; and this constant gaze of lurking suspicion bears upon some weak natures a depressing effect, like that haunting dread still commonly felt by the superstitious who believe themselves "*over-looked*."

If our rural labourers are to improve, it is upon Plots of Land they must be invited to develop and expend those manlier energies some of them still possess; but which at present appear to be drifting to distant shores, or dying out at home, leaving a residuum of dull imbecility. The complaint as to the mental and physical deterioration (possibly relative rather than positive) of our agricultural labourers is wide-spread and apparently well-founded; while good reason for it is not far to seek. If, too, the present complaint of the unprofitableness, in a commercial sense, of our agricultural industry be as well-founded as wide-spread, and not the mere accident of a run of bad seasons, then it is imperatively necessary, if the prosperity of our agriculture is indeed a great and national concern, that the well-being of the agricultural labourer should receive attention.



How painful then it is to find the one only sure source of home contentment and general improvement for our labourers, the more general increase of allotment gardens and small farm plots, to be worked chiefly by spade husbandry, looked upon as an evil because likely to clash with the established system of game-preserving! To enable an impartial judgment to be formed of the comparative value of these two things, let us note an instance or two (*ab uno disce omnes*) of Game-Preserving and Small Plot-Farming.

I select, out of a dozen such, one instance of Small Plot-Farming, because the results in this particular case were obtained without any of the advantages and under every disadvantage to which a farmer on a large scale is subject; without, moreover, any of those advantages attaching to soil in good tilth from long-continued garden treatment and spade cultivation. Through some homely pasture fields a roadway runs, called "Bye-Fields," the quiet landscape without feature to distinguish it from a thousand other such in any part of rural England, and not far distant stands the cottage of my friend William —. William is a stout-built man, rather broad than tall, with an honest open countenance of the Saxon type, and nothing to distinguish him from the ordinary English labourer. But he is remarkable in this way, that he is a characteristic average example of what all our labourers might be if simply afforded the opportunity of sharpening and improving their own "sprack" wit. He can neither read nor write, and is naturally slow rather than quick witted; but he has always—though ever working hard and steadily and honestly—contrived through all his working life, to secure every year some occasional

changes of employment, and has had in his own hands almost every season some little Plot of Land upon which he has been free to exercise unfettered his own skill and judgment ; yet a better farm-servant never handled a tool, nor was there ever one more punctual and willing to work, nor one whose services farmers were more eager to secure. As for Game, no thought of it has ever troubled William's brain beyond such slight preventive repair or stopping of fences as may have occasionally appeared necessary ; so that in his case the possession of an allotment garden has never made him either an idle servant or a poacher.

At Michaelmas, 1877, William "took" forty "perch" (a quarter of an acre) of land of ordinary heavy quality—poorish sandy loam, approaching to clay—being a portion of a field let out in allotments, and forming part of the glebe in the parish of Blank, of which a truly excellent man, who sympathises with his parishioners, is the incumbent. William's predecessor in the tenancy of the little plot had been a slovenly man, and the worthy rector, in letting it to the new occupier, agreed for an annual rental of fifteen shillings and sixpence (equal to three pounds two shillings per acre) to cover all outgoings for rates and taxes, but stipulating that the land should be cleaned and put as speedily as might be into a good state of cultivation. The land had been "sown-down" to clover and field grass, of which William cut "what there was" about the third week in June of the following year, 1878. Immediately after this the ground was ploughed up, a neighbouring small farmer furnishing the use of a horse and plough in exchange for so much in money and some of the clover hay, and then "burn-baked," the result of the burning being sixteen

or seventeen loads (of about twenty bushels per load) of ashes, which were carefully spread over the land, no other manure whatever being applied. The top-dressing of ashes was "let bide" about six weeks, and then ploughed in deep. In November the little plot was sowed to wheat, the "prong" being the only tool, and manual labour the only labour used in this operation. The following year was that dismal and never-to-be-forgotten year of cold and rainy weather, 1879, when a general outcry went up throughout the land that the death-knell of English agriculture had at last been tolled. But, his stout heart not utterly cast down, William reaped and stacked his little crop of wheat, and on thrashing it he found the produce to be two sacks and three bushels of clean corn with a little "tailing" over, equal to eleven sacks per acre of marketable wheat, which, being a very superior sample, was sold at twenty-five shillings per sack, a tenant on a larger estate some miles away securing it for "seed." The straw of the entire crop was sold for twenty-six shillings. From the above statement the value of the returns on this crop of wheat may be calculated, and the figures for the outgoings, in addition to rent, may be compiled from the following:—First and second ploughing cost ten shillings, and the entire manual labour spent upon the piece of land throughout was "about a fortnight" for ordinary work, in addition to which, to use William's own words, "three of us dug in the wheat in one day," and there was equal to "about eight or nine days for one man burn-baking." Now calculating the value of the clover-ley at equal to the first year's rent, William's account will show a balance in his favour of clear profit at the rate of four pounds

fifteen shillings per acre, upon an ordinary farm crop, grown on soil of poorish quality, previously ill-cultivated, and in a wretched bad year. If results at all commensurate to this can be obtained by adopting Small Plot cultivation of land extensively throughout the kingdom, its immense national importance cannot be over-estimated. It may be urged, and urged fairly, that it is dangerous to draw broad conclusions from narrow premises; but this example is given (from amongst many) because of its *unfavourable* conditions; and while, in making a wider application, deductions from the general average may be conceded, on the one hand, for soils inferior and industry less capable than William's, it must be allowed, on the other, that an enhanced value may be calculated on for growth of ordinary garden crops, such as potatoes, cabbages, carrots, parsnips, onions, and for occasional superior garden crops, such as cauliflowers, lettuces, rhubarb, and asparagus. I say nothing about fruits, because successful fruit cultivation (in our climate) demands special conditions, capital, and skill, such as to place that branch of gardening beyond the scope and reach of Plots of Land and Peasant Proprietors; nevertheless, there is no reason why in any far-seeing calculation the profitable production in fit localities of gooseberries, currants, the hardier sorts of apples, plums, and strawberries, should not be allowed due consideration.

With respect to Game Preserving, I believe its grosser evils are generally acknowledged; but we submit to them through force of habit and custom, and by reason of that profound almost blind respect for the Landowner which has become a part of our nature. A fact of such profound

significance as the following, for instance, was told to me by a highly respectable tenant-farmer in an easy off-hand manner, as if it were almost a matter of course. His family rented, quite recently, a farm of two hundred and eighty acres on the estate of a considerable landowner near the border of a western county, where the farm-lands adjoin a rambling tract of broken woodland preserved by the proprietor. Finding, after trial of a few years' duration, that the damage done to crops by rabbits was ruinous, the tenants succeeded in making terms with the landlord, whereby the right was conceded to them to destroy rabbits where and when found upon their farm. The first year, in two months, they killed over a thousand rabbits, and during the remainder of their term, which lasted some three years longer (they left the farm immediately the lease expired) they continued to destroy each year an average of from twelve to fifteen hundred rabbits. What the new legislative "thin-end-o'-the-wedge" will do of improvement in this direction remains (at present) to be seen; many of those the most interested doubt exceedingly. Naturally they have no robust faith that fathom-thick walls will ever be toppled down.

But the utter and unredeemed *Selfishness* of much of our modern system of game-preserving and sport is an aspect of it less gross, and not perhaps much heeded by the general eye; yet it is a pregnant fact which the coming years may see stripped naked.

Towards the close of a day's partridge shooting I once saw an exhibition of skill in shooting by the noble owner of a large landed estate, who was not only himself a crack shot but the descendant of a race of crack shots. The

"birds" had been carefully driven by an army of markers and keepers, from all other parts of the estate shot over, towards a particular piece of turnips, which chanced in that instance to be in an allotment field. Lord R——, gun in hand, personally attended by four under-keepers to act as loaders, with one or two assistant carriers, in all seven double barrels (it was long before the invention of the breech-loader), took up a convenient position, when the order was given for the broken and cowering coveys to be put up, which was so carried out that a brisk and uninterrupted flight of birds was maintained, "stopped" right, left, and all round by his lordship's fatal fire with marvellous rapidity and precision, he never stepping from his position, but facing nimbly whenever necessary, dealing death from sixteen heated tubes like an animated mitrailleuse. The exact number of the "bag" and the minutes occupied in making it, cannot be recorded, as no careful note was taken at the time, for the practice being a regular one, and wont to be arranged upon the method described whenever his lordship shot during the early part of the season, the feat was not considered remarkable; but the number killed was not far off two score brace, and the time under a quarter-of-an-hour. On another occasion a wealthy gentleman, a remarkable shot at pheasants, destroyed to his own guns—for he too used some five or six at a time, with a corresponding number of loaders—at the rate of a pheasant every three-quarters of a minute during the brief hours of one day's sport, the slaughtered numbering over two hundred brace; and they were loaded up into dog-carts and driven rapidly to the nearest railway station, to be despatched to London the same night.

Now, in each of these typical examples of diverse modes of action in dealing with Land—the method of the Peasant and the method of the Peer—granting that *Selfishness* or self-interest lies equally at the bottom of both, is it not plainly evident in the one case the personal aspect is that of Virtue, in the other that of Vice?—while as to their relative bearing towards the commonweal the difference of the methods is so gross, the inferences to be drawn from full consideration of them so palpable, it is needless to point out which makes the most for General Happiness; nor is it necessary, with such obvious truths before us, tediously to accentuate the *how* and the *why*.

As for the open Battue—a number of crack shots backing themselves to slaughter against Time—it was an anachronism when introduced into this country, and being still looked on with aversion by the majority of true sportsmen, the practice of it ought to be abolished, in the interests of good taste, if for no higher reason. The joys of battue-shooting may be compared to the feverish delights of heavy gambling—fierce but fleeting, and are purchased at a monstrous cost of time, money, and *something more*, out of all proportion to the small result.

Further sermon upon the comparative merits of the two land systems—the Aristocratic, the leading idea of which is Sport; the Democratic, the leading idea of which is Produce—being (as just stated) better avoided, there is yet one aspect of the game question which demands a glance of pity: it is that infatuation of so many worthy gentlemen missing real sport for want of the requisite moral courage to follow their own true instincts. If the collision,

on some approaching day, of the aristocratic and the democratic systems be to be avoided (as it may and ought to be), a return to the old idea of sport with the gun appears to be worth consideration. At the present moment the old-fashioned mode of shooting appears to be dead-and-gone, like the flint locks which kept it in fashion, and no more to be presently restored than sound October or Chace venison ; yet Time may bring round—as it is wont to do where life is healthy, and a people wise—an old institution in a new dress, and our grandsons, or our sons, mayhap, may enjoy, as their forefathers did, a healthy stroll after a miscellaneous bag, with a favourite new weapon, a brace of highly-trained setters, a trusty henchman, and a friend, beating over with varying zest the cottar's plot, the farmer's fields, and their own coverts.

It is commonly said, and with a show of superficial truth, that now, in our day, there are no gross abuses to reform, that all the wicked giants' castles are stormed, and no more heroic work remains upon British soil to be done. But the man who could shiver all night in a pit-dwelling, and yet live, and transmit to us some strain of his savage blood now coursing in our veins, must have had a much denser hide and a much duller brain than even the densest and dullest "clod" of the present day ; and yet to him, the first-born, half animal as he was, there came the desire and time of change ; and even so now to the last born, the humble peasant, the same desire and time must come. It is the lowest who last rides up the endless revolving wheel. As our mental organization becomes more sensitive, abuses are perceived, and presently felt to be intolerable, whose very existence was before unsuspected. It is contrary



both to reason and analogy that our rural labourers should much longer be content to remain in their present cramped and negative condition ; and nothing would tend more to soften the asperities of the coming time of change, than the exercise of wise forethought in the gradual bestowal upon them of some share of direct personal interest in the Land they cultivate.

We are now, by aid of legislative intervention, teaching the labourer to read, and therefore bestowing upon him the key of a wider field of knowledge ; we must go further, and allow him facilities for expansion ;—the honest labouring man in England should have for old age some other possible future than the ever-looming Workhouse ! Our efforts for the improvement of the lot of our humblest brother are, or have been, too much marked by that artificial character we contemptuously call “ sham,” but which is not, in this connexion, so much the offspring of vicious design as of weak endeavour. We have been too much in the habit of patting him on the back by the hands of curates and pious ladies, soothing him with soft and senseless words, the more irritating because well meant. The weakly in mind or body submit to this with apparent good grace, but the stronger working-man revolts from it ; there is so apparent in it all the condescending assumption, that he must ever be the patient animal upon whose back well-born children may ride. That the lower levels must ever be tenanted is certain ; but a particular class being shut down in them is slavery. Under a foolish system of patronage, the rare peasant gifted with a robust, more restless intellect, inclined to beat against the bars, is a dangerous animal, to be avoided rather than

encouraged ; and thus, perhaps, the flickering fire is damped which might, under favourable conditions, have helped to vivify a stolid class, and so have added to the general good ; or, perhaps, he kicks up his heels and turns "ranter" preacher, testifying against the scarlet woman and the devouring beast ; or, taking the wrong turn in the road down which he has bolted, plunges into the troublous mire of poaching. It is a hard thing to say, but I never yet knew a labouring man a district-visitor's *favourite* who was not ingrain a cadger.

The Farmer's present view of the Labourer is, that he is a machine, out of whom he must get as much work as possible, at the lowest rate of wages discoverable by the higgling of the market ; with a lurking desire in the background—entertained rather than expressed—for retributive punishment to fall upon him, in that he has transgressed by listening to the voice of Mr. Joseph Arch. The farmer, too, objects to pay for teaching the labourer's children to read ; dislikes—as who does not !—local rates of all kinds ; but fails, entirely, to see that poors'-rates are, in reality, a kind of measure of relief (of a very wasteful and doubtful character, truly) in aid of wages.

As for the Landowner, personally he knows nothing of the labourer upon whose toil his rents depend ; he reserves his pleasanter intercourse with people beneath him for gamekeepers and grooms, with whom there is a direct bond of sympathy ;—indeed, if ever so anxious to win a foothold in the labourer's arcanum, he finds there is a gulf fixed between him and it which it is most difficult to cross. His agent, it is true, worries him about cottage building ;

a cruel operation he consents to, as he might consent to the extraction of a decayed tooth, and, after sinking his capital, he looks round in vain for compensatory gratitude. He receives, in full measure, the wordy thanks of all who are professionally interested ; but if he be—as he often is—a man of genuine feeling, these scarcely satisfy him ; and he cannot, moreover, but suspect the stock cant about morality. The sensitive mind recognizes a peculiar nauseating flavour in the cant about poor people's morality—like that peculiar *gout* of an over-ripe pine—as if, forsooth, it were a thing in which the poor themselves had no active concern ; but being packed up by their betters in span-new red-brick walls and blue-slate roofs, like soap or candles in patent wrappers, they were to be moral forthwith, and spare further handling by delicate fingers. If the easy chat of Mr. Whichcord the trainer, Sim the jockey, Frank the groom, or even of respectable Mr. Pursy the butler, be worth listening to, it would appear there are things done even amidst the spotless purity of snow-white marble and fine gold which vicarious penance of poor folk in prim boxes of brick and slate can scarcely atone for !

In short, the whole gist of the matter lies in a nutshell,—if we would improve the condition of the agricultural labourer we must give him leave to be a Man. Do not start, my lords ! as if there were something dreadful in a proposition such as this. If a social revolution, placing the humblest toilers higher in the scale of manhood, be to be accomplished by anything short of hoist of gunpowder—which violence God forbid !—the process will be a slow one, and scarcely need a single footstep stray from off the beaten track. In the slowly coming days, our grand-

children will be plodding along the paths where we now plod—let us hope with a brighter light to guide them—and then, perchance, English labourers will be living in cottages of their own construction, and "anxious, above all things—while contributing their fair share to the national wealth, and to the general sum of human happiness—to conserve that political and social cosmos of which their own potato plots will form so important a factor.

The strange mental conflict aroused, between one's sentiment of the picturesque and one's knowledge of the useful, in view of the Squire's plain new cottages, is painful ;—which emotion is false ?—for two things equally true ought to agree. It appears, now, either that we must eschew the picturesque, and cling to the useful, as exhibited in these new cottages ; or that we must yearn for the picturesque, and abhor the useful, thinking of the old thatched gables that are gone. And yet neither state of mind can be exactly right. Should the architect be called in to set matters right, and should he skilfully evolve some symmetrical arrangement of overhanging gables and tall brick chimneys, defensible enough on æsthetic grounds, there still lingers a doubt that such purely artistic efforts are misplaced ; while, should he blunder upon mere mask of fussy ornament, the doubt becomes a certainty ; and, in either case, upon the bill being called in, the mind is shocked at the waste of wealth. If one's taste for the picturesque be equally gratified by a straw-built shed as by overhanging gables and tall brick chimneys, might not the extra cost of the latter be better applied to some other purpose ? The little mud or stone built cote in the woodland is always picturesque—could we not take *that* as the

germ of our improved cottage?—and then help the native model by putting in really substantial dry floors, a useful cooking range, good water supply, and, perhaps, an artistic “bit” for the rustics to exercise their wits about,—a sculptured panel in the gable, or an incised slab in the south wall, kept clear of climbing eglantine. I would that the labourers built their own cottages—each man his own cot on his own plot. We should then not only exercise and brighten all their senses, but preserve that special constructive faculty common to primitive men in all countries, but now completely dying out among our peasantry by process of degenerate evolution. There is a natural art of building peculiar to each district in this kingdom, and survivals in remote places of early types little suspected. The old-fashioned village carpenter (if there be one left) frames his “sell” and cuts his tenons and pins, without the aid of drawings or instructions, upon a method handed down by tradition through ten centuries. I have seen a farm stable, part of an ancient farmstead, recently fitted up with native oak in a rude but substantial way by a hedge-carpenter, with yet a charm about it beyond the reach of smooth-planed deal, in which the solid boards have a moulding roughly struck upon them the counterpart of one common in fourteenth century churches. Great artists should devote special talents to special subjects, but the common ruck of men are most improved and kept at their best by efforts in the direction proverbially ascribed to Jack-of-all-Trades. My old friend in East Anglia, who had the head of the young Antinous, was perfect master of one handicraft, not a bad hand at two others, and could dabble in all the rest.

Our instinctive horror at sight of imported bricks and slates made up into *superior cottages* may, however, be true enough, after all, and right enough—as instinctive feelings generally are—for cottages built of such materials are often “jerry” built, and it is a kind of prescience of the *sham* that chills us. It cannot, we feel, improve the morals of the newly-housed inmates to find all the panels warp and split, and all the door and window fastenings break, although they have cost, as the cottagers are aware, so much money ; while the glazy drain-pipes, about which so much fuss was made, are found on trial to lead to nowhere, and they accumulate in a year or two a dreadful pool of slush a hundred yards or so away from the moral cottages, whence the devil Typhus leaps and lays his hot hand upon the moral cottagers, whose teeth have already been set on edge by detection of so many shams. “*They are slated, whitewashed, and many of them ornamented with sham windows and balustrades,*” says a grave Report upon improved labourers’ cottages, than which complacent public evidence of the existence of utter wrongness in such matters, it is impossible in the way of demonstration to further go.

That thatch should have fallen into disrepute as a covering for cottage roofs is indeed a pity ; it is the sweetest, best, and most natural shelter, in country quarters, under which a man can live or sleep, through summer’s heat or winter’s cold. When well done of good reed by a clever thatcher, there is no roof-covering that is more artistic ; and the prejudice against it on account of fire is ill-founded, resulting from a combination of conditions not all attributable to the *thatch*. Slating on a roof with fire under

it hops and flies in a thousand directions, complete destruction by fire following where water is not abundantly applied, and where it is, the remedy proving as bad as the disease ; while hard thatching, if only a little damped, may partially smoulder, but it will not burn, and it keeps out perilous draughts and flooding engine-water from the inner fittings. I have had some experience of fires, and I never saw thatch on a cottage roof burn freely but once, and then there was a fierce heat under it, and it was lifted up in the wind's eye by a rascal builder in want of a job.

No greater or more convincing proof need be sought for, of the vivifying effect of change of scene and employment upon the powers of the labourer, than is furnished by the acknowledged results of emigration ; and partial migration, or the occasional cultivation of his own garden and attention to his own affairs, have the same beneficial effect upon him. So far from there being any justification for the jealousy of land-owners and tenant-farmers, that granting a small plot of land to a labourer would tend to make him a bad servant, the converse is true, that a mind quickened and muscular powers improved by the interesting toil upon his own garden for one-fourth of his working time, would leave the labourer anxious to earn wages for the remaining three-fourths, and in fitter condition to do so profitably both to himself and to his master. The small cottar, instead of being a *worse*, is at all times a *better* wage-earner than the drudge. As a parallel illustration of this wholesome truth, I may mention a notable fact which came under my own observation, in Lincolnshire, at a large farm on Trent-side, occupied by a man of good capital and very considerable ability, who was endowed with a keen yet genial power of

observation. As was the custom in that district, several hinds lodged in the house or on the premises, and there was no lack of other good and well-paid local labourers ; but at the commencement of grass-cutting an Irishman from Connaught used to arrive at Old Park Farm, who went by no other name than simple "John," and slept on straw in a loft like any other Irish "tramp," whose custom it was to work all through the hay and the corn harvests, and to depart again for his own country after all the crops were garnered. Nothing remarkable in this, perhaps, but there is in the fact that "John" worked not as occasional strapper but as *foreman*. After a first season's trial, Mr. C—— regularly engaged "John" (the "*John*" I believe a shrewd concession to the jealous prejudices of the local labourers) who, in pursuance of such engagement, regularly came at the beginning, took charge of all the work, and carried through the whole of the very considerable harvest operations to the end, working hard himself, and keeping those under him hard at work also, to the great satisfaction and profit of his employer. This mutually beneficial contract was carried out for a number of years, and, I may add, honest "John," who never drank anything but *diluted milk*, used to receive at the end of each season a handsome sum as wages, which he faithfully carried home to his own people.

The Irishman who can expend his energies upon profitable work, is in the main a peaceable creature, and it need scarcely be said the same remark applies with even greater force to Scotchmen or Englishmen. And yet we are told of some wonderful revolutionary political code entertained by our sluggish down-country farm labourers,



and which has been held up as a "bogey" before the eyes of Tory squires. I have known the ways of labouring people, intimately, closely, and from an *inside* point of view, all my life, and have had, since the labourers began their agitation, every opportunity, of which I have availed myself fully, of learning what was passing through their minds, and I declare emphatically I am unable to accept as strict truth any part of that extraordinary statement. Even the manifestoes of the professional leaders in the agricultural labour agitation are many of them in a great measure mere "bunkum," laughed at alike by farmers and labourers; there is no settled charter or plan in the mind of anybody, only a restlessness which natural causes are slowly evolving and which the accidents of times and seasons just now tend to aggravate. I do not believe that the settlement of rate of wages alone will satisfy the awakening mind of the Agricultural Poor, nor is it right that it should, nor would such settlement be for the best interests of that class or of the country at large. The hour is fast approaching, or has already come, for some amendment of the time-honoured but too artificial system upon which our large Landed Interest is based; and the humble soil-tiller does but obey, with the rest, that mysterious impulse in the air which he of all men is least able to explain or to formulate. As spring approaches, the hybernating bear begins to tremble with returning life, and so, as morning dawns, the domestic hound grows restless, where he lies sleeping at your door—give him a kindly recognition as he yawns and stretches himself; he will never forsake you.

I knew very intimately for many years, a worthy simple-minded master-tradesman, who had risen by his own

industry from "the ranks," but who in early life was a poor country mason's labourer. When the "Machine Riots" broke out in 1830, he marched with the rest—shouted the same watchword—yelled the same chorus—vowed the same vengeance as the leaders did ; but just on the very eve of a serious crisis learning the "soldiers" were out, he "came to himself," discreetly turned homeward, and there lay perdue in fear and trembling until the storm had blown over. Had the mere "turn of luck" chanced to be unkind to him, how different his after fate—a convicted felon ! must have been ; and yet he has often assured me, that, during all the time he was marching with the rioters, he never knew clearly "what it was all about."

The movement which ostensibly commenced with what was called The Agricultural Labourers' Strike, is a movement like that of certain timid animals, who at times are stirred by a common impulse to migrate, terrible enough in acquired momentum when the mass is moving, though each individual's volition depends very much upon that of others ; the leaders leading because the followers follow, and the followers following because the leaders lead.

## CHAPTER XII.

### BIRD MUSIC.



IN our humid climate all the year round we have the Song of Birds. When the eye is soothed and gratified beholding the fresh green robes of spring, or the more ornate garniture of summer, the ear is ravished by the melody of countless little minstrels ; nor yet, at other seasons, is the feathered choir wholly silent. Should the weather at Christmas-tide prove mild that indefatigable chanter, the Song-thrush, may be heard, even then, tuning his oaten stop about the parsonage shrubbery ; while his brother minstrel, the Blackbird, of wilder habits, seldom commences to sing even in the most " open " winters until some weeks after the advent of the New Year. These warblings of our homely songsters at unusual seasons may be considered aberrations from the common programme of Bird-music for the year ; but they fall on the ear like the unexpected greeting of a friend. There is naught of sorrow in the clear canticle of the Thristle ; if, perchance, we hear it in winter, we cannot but perceive it is a ray of sunshine hath unloosed his speckled throat ; he carries in his heart a fairy-well of sunny memories, bubbling over in dropping music at the slightest gleam from sympathetic skies.

But we have two other homely singers, the Fauvette (or

Hedge Sparrow) and the Robin, whose constant song may be heard the whole year round, and almost irrespective of the weather. There is scarcely a month in the year when the simple ditty of the Fauvette may not be heard; but it must be listened for in rough weather or it may be lost, it is so quiet and unpretentious. Should the wind be whistling through the trees, or some bolder songster, like the Wren or Robin, be warbling near, the mellow twittering of the little grey bird is not noticed whispering among the fallen leaves. In Yorkshire vernacular she is called "Cuddy" or "Cuddy Hedge Creeper;" a name most picturesque, as vulgar names commonly are. Like the Robin, its frequent companion, the "Cuddy" will occasionally warble its feeble trills when the ground is nipped with frost or covered with snow, creeping at such times mouse-like about the dry roots of privet hedges, or through the lower boughs of hardy evergreens.

Just the opposite to the modest Fauvette is the pert Wren—her wee perky body and loud voice preposterously out of proportion, but both equally expressive of assurance. Spring or summer, autumn or winter, you are never sure if you scare the little brown-jerkinéd braggart from some sheltering bush, drifting away in the ruffling air like a tiny wisp of animated feathers, that he may not suddenly cling to a conspicuous twig and rattle out a defiant bravura!

The Red-breast is neither so shy as the Fauvette nor so obtrusive as the Wren, but claims our especial protection with a modest confidence. No tender heart can refuse the kindly dole of crumbs to "poor Bob" when, with ruddy breast and slender limbs half buried in the snow, he appeals

to his human friends for charity. The pipe the Robin tunes upon our window-sill, while dull earth seems dead, warbles hope, as the bright voice of the Swallow clinging to our eaves, when the new-born flowers awake, laughs joy ;—they are our little household favourites, coming, like messengers from bird-world, to keep alive in our hearts the tenderest and most spiritual emotions.

The song of the Redbreast in the winter season consists of simple trills, whistled in a soft tone and minor key, interspersed with solemn pauses more eloquent than sound ; there are also occasional faintly-whispered notes, especially a plaintive prolonged final note, peculiarly touching ; yet, as if by some power of chastened fortitude, the bird sustains his cheerfulness withal. When the Swallow has come, the Robin, needed no longer, forsakes the sheltering roof of his protector, and hies him with his mate to some remote corner of the garden, or to remoter coppice, to establish a household of his own. There, busy with new duties and filled with secret joys, the bird's little heart gives vent to fresh emotions in a richer and more varied song, but reserved for the patient ear of his tender mate alone ; for those who fondly listened to his homilies in winter regard him no more. But the true-hearted bird is in no wise cast down by semblance of ingratitude, his free bird-breast knows but one pure inspiration, ever to be doing cheerfully the business of to-day, ready to meet with a bright eye the coming morrow. When winter, with white effacing snow, once more comes round, constant Robin will be at his post again, making his smiling bow upon the window-sill, well assured of a kindly greeting. The large place filled, in the gentler tide of our

domestic life, by Robin Redbreast could be fully estimated were some cruel stroke of fate suddenly to smite him dumb in winter, like so many other birds, or to sweep away from our snow-clad lawns his tiny foot-prints for ever !

It is chiefly when absorbed in the joyous business of pairing, and the tender anxieties of nesting and nidification, that our singing birds pour forth their full flood of song. Throughout creation the season of love is the season of song, but more especially is pairing-time the time of music with the sprightly birds. Naturally, those birds who never leave us, but brave our uncertain climate through all its stern vicissitudes, are the most at home amid the coy promises of our frosty springs, and they commonly begin, with characteristic daring, preparations for nesting before lingering winter has yet departed. One of the very first to herald the return of the sooth season is the gallant Storm Cock, largest and most stout-hearted of our song birds. Long before his cousins-german, the Feldt-fare and the Vindedrossel, have set sail for their ancestral Scandinavian home, he and his mate have selected the wind-rocked cross-tree upon which to lash their new wicker cradle. There, with well-grounded confidence in their vessel, the hardy pair defy the gale, and take command, screeching harsh watch-words—like Danes from the wet deck of a lumbering sluppe—at the driving fleet of rooks, who, heeding the warning, cease their clamour, beat cautiously to windward to gain a safe offing and scud rapidly away. When all is snug and ship-shape and the vessel rocks smoothly in a steady breeze, the jovial master-mariner takes his call-pipe, and, mounting the top-most mast, lets slip down the whispering gale a

stave or two of wild music. This is the song which he sings, consisting of a few vagrant whistling notes, resembling the word "dear" repeated, generally, five times with a piping tremulous intonation—"d-e-a-r—d-e-a-r—d-e-a-r—d-e-a-r—d-e-a-r." It may be listened for in suitable localities, about the early part of February.

But it is not until spring is well advanced, and our summer migrants have arrived that the full chorus of bird-music bursts forth. Then to our native Thrushes, Finches, Larks, and Linnets come the travelling warblers, the Willow-wrens, the Black-cap, and *Signor* Nightingale, making our vernal air throb with the echo of their united opera. A curious band of little jongleurs then take possession of the common hedge-rows, and make them vocal with the din of their chattering minstrelsy. They mount up through the leafy covert, wherever low down lies hidden in cunningly-woven casket their speckled treasure, and dance up and down upon the elastic air, their little heads thrown back between their fluttering wings, and their soft throats distended with excess of joyous emotion! These little birds are happily named White-throat (*sylvia cinerea*), and by the East Anglian peasantry "Hedge-hack," an equally happy designation.

A small creature, closely allied to the White-throat, is the Chiff-Chaff (*sylvia hippolais*), whose peculiar notes once heard cannot be easily forgotten. The usual song is a bold sharply-accented refrain, consisting of a repetition of two notes, sounding like the common name; "chiff-chaff—chiff-chaff—chiff-chaff," but it is occasionally varied, thus, "chiff-chaff—cherry-churry, chiff-chaff—cherry-churry."

Another remarkable summer bird-note is that of the Wryneck (*yunx terquilla*), which is frequently heard in the eastern counties, though but very seldom in the west of England : within my own personal experience only once. The habits and appearance of the Wryneck are also peculiar. The bird usually arrives in this country early in April, just before the Cuckoo comes, for which reason he is happily named by the Norfolk peasantry "Cuckoo's leader." His call is clear and piping, as the shrill clarion of a herald should be, consisting of one note very rapidly uttered and repeated several times — "twe-twe-twe-twe-twe-twe-twe-twe-twe." This strange call the observer may hear repeated perhaps twice, with a brief interval between, he the while, though certain the sound is produced close at hand, unable to discover the performer ; when there ensues a longer pause, during which the bird, still undetected, is flying to a distant tree, from whence again there comes the strange wild cry, lessened in power though not in weird effect by the distance. Should his immediate presence be detected, the little creature may be watched twisting his head and neck about not unlike a snake, though a more common attitude is that of perfect repose, when the bird, clinging lengthwise close to the bark, looks like some queer dried specimen pinned down on a strip of cork. This bird also fills in popular estimation the mysterious position of "Cuckoo's man," a place he is not entitled to, as it properly belongs to others, although congenial habits and simultaneous arrival in this country may occasionally bring Wryneck and Cuckoo into close proximity. A kind of nebulous superstition attaches to this simple phenomenon of the "Cuckoo's man," —really, where not a mere accidental circumstance, only



the little foster-parent flying after the full-grown young Cuckoo—which is most interesting as being readily traceable to its root. A facile type, also, of greater and world-wide superstitions, which, doubtless, had their origin in remote ages, when primitive men, through force of circumstances, observed natural phenomena keenly (much more so than now they are commonly observed), but with that proneness to invest them with supernatural attributes born of wonder and fear: the characteristics alike of savages and children.

The plumage of the Wryneck is quite as remarkable as are its peculiar habits and its singular cry. By the complex colouring of the feathers on all parts of the bird a general effect of motley or spottiness is produced, such as we see in the case of certain moths, reptiles, and even other birds, though chiefly of a totally different species; in fact, the Wryneck is in this respect the type of a class, the obvious design of such admirable painting being to screen the wearer from observation. On a close examination of the plumage, the most exquisite ornamentation both in design and colouring is apparent, every feather being more or less barred, spotted, clouded, pencilled with an infinite variety of shades and tints of brown, buff, yellow, white, black, and sad blue, contrasted sharply in quaint bars and lines, or toned in soft gradations; yet a careless eye might deem this superbly decorated dress a plain mottled grey. The favourite haunts of the Wryneck are ant-hills and decayed trees, where it searches for food; and the general grey colour of such objects corresponding to the general grey colour of the bird is made up in the same wonderful manner by Nature's lavish pencil. Let but a square foot

of a sunburnt ant-hill on a heathy waste, or a square inch of a decayed and worm-eaten bough be closely examined, and a wealth of colour (perhaps before unsuspected) will be discovered—dots and streaks, and delicate shades of colour, some bright and rich as topaz or coral, on lichen, fibre, speculæ, sober in general effect, but more beautiful and elaborate in detail than the gaudiest flower. Some other birds—for instance the Tree-creeper (*Certhia familiaris*), the Goat-sucker (*Caprimulgus Europæus*), and the Ptarmigan (*Tetrao lagopus*), in its summer dress, may be cited as having plumage, though perhaps less richly and minutely decorated, of the same special character as that of the Wryneck, the inference being that colour is influenced rather by external circumstances than by structural affinities. A flock of Ptarmigan nestling among the heather and granite of the mountain side, and the little Wryneck clinging to a dead bough, are illustrations equally striking of felicitous adaptation to surrounding circumstances.

When the Cuckoo arrives, following in plain attire, as a brave gallant should, his painted herald, summer's open court can be no further graced ; he comes, the chief troubadour and daintiest master of the gay science, twanging his wanton lute, and all the country side stands still to listen ! The tender Swallow is the harbinger of spring, but the bold Cuckoo comes when the husbandman in our fickle climate dares to hope that summer draws nigh. In western pastoral districts, when dairymen meet, no question is more frequently or more anxiously put than this—"Has t' heard th' Cuckoo yet ?" And he who, rising earliest and listening longest, is the first to vouch that he has heard the bird of summer becomes quite a hero for the nonce. To children

the voice of the Cuckoo, falling plain on the ear from something unseen, conveys a sense of mystery; yet of joy, so full of tender sunshine is the gentle spirit-voice.

There are two other wandering bird-voices which fall upon the unaccustomed ear with a deeper meaning—the monotonous call of the Corn-crake, and the eerie droning of the Night-jar. The slow “c-r-a-k-e—c-r-a-k-e” stealing from the drowsy meadows, heavy with the dews of summer night, now here, now there, pervading the darkling landscape, inspires a dreamy melancholy; while the buzzing “j-a-r-r-r-r-r,” heard close over-head in the gloom of silent woods, alarms the beating heart with sense of fear: in no wise allayed by the presence of the bird, should he be seen, flitting fantastically up and down, whirling swiftly round and about the shadowy oak like something unearthly. I knew an instance where, for a month of summer, the townsfolk of a little western town believed the story of a haunting ghost in the woods of a neighbouring park, upon no other foundation than the phenomenal appearance of a Goat-sucker, heard rather late at night, but not seen, by an *uninspired* townsman.

The Cuckoo is not shy, and any mystery supposed to attach to his movements is due rather to inexperience on the part of the observer than to any disinclination to be seen on the part of the bird. A single bird, but oftener a pair, may be seen apparently dusting in the public highway, and on being disturbed on such occasions, so far from showing wildness, a series of short fluttering flights, with repeated settling in front of the traveller, is the result. The pleasantest time both to see and hear him is after a warm

shower in May, lying under a spreading oak, when just as a cheerful gleam of sunshine laughs out from the purple clouds, brightening the green pastures where the dappled cows stand lowing, a dove-coloured bird, with long tail and fluttering wings, alights upon a bough just overhead, and lets fall into your ear his mellow notes—"cuck'-oo —— cuck'-oo!"

The stammering of the Cuckoo towards the latter part of the season, beginning in June and growing worse in July, is a phenomenon commonly observed, being generally a stammering on the first note only, more or less prolonged, with final utterance of the second; but sometimes a slow and painful "cuck—cuck—cuck," is all the once clear singer can articulate; the northern rustics saying then, "he is choked with a barley awn." But the Cuckoo has a wild warbling note or call not often noticed; I have heard the bird flying high over the tree-tops in June, uttering this rapid, liquid, gurling cry, not unlike the laughing call of the green Wood-sprite; but softer and more melodious. Heard at a long distance on a sultry summer afternoon, the ordinary song of the Cuckoo comes throbbing through the laden air with a faint pulsation exactly resembling the drowsy "beat" of an old-fashioned clock—the first note thrust on the languid ear, the second lapsing almost into silence—felt, not heard; and I think it must have been this curious resemblance which first suggested to the horologists of the seventeenth century—so quaintly cunning in the invention of mechanical clocks—the notable idea of the "cuckoo clock." A parallel invention is the clock with a full-rigged ship, rocking her masts out (if that were possible) on the waves of Time, as a real

ship might rise and fall becalmed on the ground-swell of some tropic sea.

The most musical sounds to the sportsman's ear, as sober Autumn furbishes up her breech-loaders, is the loud chuckling crow of the cock Pheasant in the hazel copse, or the evening call of the Partridges among the stubbles ; though I know of few sounds more touching than the gathering-call of the cock Partridge, softened by distance, "chuck-r-r-r-r, chuck-r-r-r-r," as the early dusk begins to settle down, what time the days "pull in" and the turnips give off that wholesome smell telling of coming winter ; the poor birds running to huddle together in their accustomed place, perhaps to count their "wounded" and "missing," perhaps a whole covey (in blissful ignorance of gun-shot) gathered to rest unconscious of their fate.

That a feature so essentially characteristic of our rural life and scenery as the song of birds, and so in unison with the poetic temperament, should have given an essential colouring to our national poetry, from the time of Chaucer downward, is but natural ; the emotions, thoughts, and fancies inspired by the birds being reflected and enshrined in a thousand imperishable gems of poesy wrought by our great masters. But the humblest rustic lover confesses the same fond inspiration, and next to his mistress's eyebrow the birds are sure to have chief place in his jangling verse :—

"Oh ! as I was a-walking, one morning in spring,  
To hear the *birds* whistling, and the *nightingale* sing,  
I spied a fair damsel——"

is a form of opening (more poetic than grammatical) which has done duty for a hundred unwritten love-ditties ; and I

have heard it myself chanted, with variations, by plough-boys and milkmaids in various parts of the kingdom. The distinction between *whistling* and *singing* is a subtle one, and proves that doggrel may be drawn from Nature.

Perhaps, we have but one bird SINGER—the Nightingale. Perhaps, the proud pre-eminence held by Philomela, above all the warblers of the grove, may be due to the fact that she sings at night ;—to that, perhaps, in part, but chiefly also, that she sings so well !

There are many birds which sing at night. I have heard the dreaming Cuckoo babbling at midnight on Midsummer eve ; and should the little Reed Warbler sleep too soundly, a friendly stone dashed with sufficient noise through the dry reeds will rouse him up, to favour you promptly with a rattling stave, at any hour of the night ; but these cannot compare with the Nightingale. Yet, there is a sweet warbler, seldom heard at night, but once heard at its best never to be forgotten, whose ravishing “division” may almost compare with that of the feathered Queen of Song. One hot, still summer night, wandering by the side of a whispering wood, I heard pouring down from the blue glimmering vault the Woodlark’s song ; the invisible bird poised at such an altitude her sweet voice sounded like the far-off quiring of the angels ! Were I to name a bird with song most musical most *melancholy*, I would name the Woodlark. The Nightingale’s song owes *its* sentiment of melancholy to association,—intrinsically it is joyous. Where there are many Nightingales and they sing in concert, as I have heard them all through a summer’s morning in Arundel Park, the “jug” and liquid bubbling

trills lose somewhat of their eloquence, and the noise becomes rapturously gay—almost clamorous! I once heard the Nightingale, and only once, in the bleak north-west angle of Dorsetshire; it was on a lovely moonlight night towards the end of May, driving home from rook-shooting, and while breathing “the mare” up a hill past a young fir plantation bordering the road; the sudden burst of florid music so near at hand being quite startling. As one gentleman of the party had never heard a Nightingale, we were all glad to “pull up” and listen for the “jug-jug,” while inhaling the odour of the budding larches, but no “jug” came. This was not the ravishing music I had so often listened to while the gloom of summer night settled around that southern wood-land;—poor Philomel could not sing the song of rapture in a strange land!

The Linnet, the Black-cap Warbler, and the Skylark are essentially birds of sunshine and broad day. The Skylark is commonly reputed the herald of the morn; and both Shakespere,—

“Hark, hark, the lark at heaven’s gate sings,  
And Phœbus ’gins arise,”—

and Milton,—

“—— the lark begin his flight,  
And singing startle the dull night,  
From his watch-tower in the skies,  
Till the dappled dawn doth rise,”—

appear to favour the opinion that the Lark commonly “mounts” before sunrise; but such I believe is not the fact, and I would rather accept the faithful lines of Gray,—

“The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,  
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,”—

as more truly indicating the bird of earliest morning.

The Skylark flutters uneasily about, uttering little snatches of song, over the dim clover leas, while yet they stir under the rustling robes of departing night, but waits until the Sun-God has shown his radiant face before rising to salute him with full morning hymn. The Swallow (chimney swallow, *Hirundo rustica*) on the contrary, sings at his best in the grey light before sunrise. Quite early on a June morning—say before three o'clock—when the balmy air gives sure promise of a fine day, as you fling open your casement to sniff the odour of the jessamine, there sits your elegant little friend on the top of the old brick "tun," or on the ridge of the tiled roof near by, quivering with passionate emotion, his rust-red throat distended, his lustrous eye full upon you, twittering his glad good-morrow. The warbling of the Swallow cannot strictly be dignified with the name of song, but it is the nearest approach to it possessed by any of the Hirundines, being an agreeable full-toned prolonged twitter, high-pitched and vivacious, yet checked by abrupt turns and pauses, stumbling along to a final guttural diminuendo run or slur in a flat key—the latter passage seeming to "go through" a sensitive listener, causing a peculiar "shimmer" of the nerves!

A true bird of the morning is the Starling, endowed with a voice similar in timbre to that of the chimney swallow, but exercised on a variety of themes, and occasionally amusingly mimetic. In spring-time, during the busy building season it is entertaining to watch the early morning operations of a nesting pair—their untiring industry and never-failing pertness. Occasionally the cock-bird, perched high on some conspicuous roof-tree (for he, too, affects the haunts of men) with half-expanded tremulous wings, displaying his lustrous



plumage to the sun, indulges in snatches of song, oddly diversified with imitations of the "popular performers." One of his favourite passages may be imitated by the aid of that unfashionable article *Sairey Gamp* would call a "*ridicule* basket." Seize with each hand the handles of that instrument, and working them violently backwards and forwards, whistling the while the best way you can, a funny *squeepy squirmy* tootling will be produced, the counterpart of that musical effort of which our dapper friend is especially vain. He is the nigger minstrel of the vernal choir.

Sparrows sometimes assemble in unusual numbers—in the bushy head of a standard hedge-row thorn, or upon an apple-tree in the garden—and carry on an excited conference, fluttering wildly round and about each other, worrying the air with incessant din of twittering chirps,—the general effect being like wordy strife or discordant chorus. Town sparrows, especially London ones, are more loquacious than country sparrows,—their ordinary chirp is clearer, louder, and there is more of it: their manners, too, congenial to the locality, amusingly correspond to the difference observable between town and country cousins. In the dull winter season, when the weather is neither cold enough for skating nor open enough for hunting, a misanthropic cock-sparrow may sometimes be seen moping upon the chilly tiles or on the sodden coping of a wall, his loud chirp no longer confident and gay, but slow strident and monotonous, conveying an impression the ludicrous counterpart of that "used-up" drumming with the heels more tragically portrayed by Hogarth in the Breakfast Scene in "*Mariage à la Mode* !"

Peace ineffable breathes in the soft cooing of the Ringdove, perhaps never heard to greater advantage than near some gray ancestral Hall, when the tender suspiration comes floating on the glowing air from the cool depths of verdurous woods.

A specific mental emotion is stirred within us by particular chords of bird music, which, perhaps, by finer insight, akin to the subtleties of spectrum analysis, might be found to be due to certain undulations of the sensory nerves: as a specific colour is produced by particular vibrations of ether. A tender melancholy or subdued rapture of a refined and elevating character—a holy calm, is produced in sympathetic minds alike by the summer cooing of the ringdove and the winter song of the redbreast, and a nearly corresponding emotion by the lengthened piano notes of the nightingale's even-song. Could our ruder musical notation fix these Elysian airs, they would be found to be closely allied to the metrical scheme of the elegiac couplet; the faintly whispered notes of the Robin, especially, fulfilling the office of the "falling" pentameter, while his solemn pauses produce a corresponding effect to that of the *cæsura*.

That the poetic temperament (of all others) derives the keenest enjoyment from bird music cannot but be true, for poets and birds are akin! Moreover, the poet is the king of men, and the highest development men aspire to is to be kings, or something more—birds! When we can fly like the birds, casting away our heavy load, and be glad with a bird's constant gladness, we shall be angels!

But the most prosaic of mortals, anxious to enjoy

to the full the whistling of the birds, may enhance his pleasures by cultivating, as far as may be, such knowledge as falls to the lot of the Field Naturalist, learning to distinguish by ear the song of each particular warbler, and to know the little minstrels' times seasons and localities. Upon the trained ear there gradually dawns—improving on the useful knowledge of the field naturalist—a delicate perception of special styles of singing, appertaining to Academies of birds in differing localities, or to individual birds of the same species;—a refinement on rude nature, the existence of which may be doubted, but which nevertheless does exist. I had long entertained a kind of hesitant suspicion that birds discoursed in dialects, before learning that other observers had come to the same conclusion. Cage-birds, of such species as have the mimetic faculty largely developed—for instance, bullfinches and starlings—are readily taught to pipe artificial airs, and they also acquire spontaneously whatever notes of other birds they most frequently hear; indeed, all cage-birds of whatever species have some trace, more or less, of this mimetic faculty; a minor proof, possibly, of capacity for development due to domestication. But, even, among wild birds the individual or idiomatic style of singing obtains, in some degree, though chiefly in those species—such as the Song Thrush—whose habits are partially domesticated. It may be as readily conceded, as being within the bounds of probability, that a particular thrush or linnet might be endowed by Nature with a musical idiosyncrasy distinguishing it from its fellows, as that the natural organ of a Lind should differ from that of a Grisi; and so much being admitted, it naturally follows that the mimetic faculty alone would

suffice to account for the establishment of academies distinguished by special styles of singing.

The Song Thrush, *par excellence*, is, as a cage-bird, an apt mimic; and, also, in a wild state displays various styles of singing. The rustics in Norfolk speak of a "Nightingale Thrush," it being commonly believed the more florid singing thrushes belong to a distinct species. In another part of the country where the true Nightingale is very seldom or never heard, I have frequently received reports of a nightingale having arrived, which on investigation have always been traced to the same source, the superior singing of some particular thrush. The Nightingale Thrush may chance to be heard, towards sunset, in any dusky grove in East Anglia, when the warm moist atmosphere of early summer lends effect to the melody. Occasionally a duet or a trio gratifies the listening ear, but whatever the number of the performers may be their style of singing proves they belong to a select academy, the notes being richer more liquid and better sustained than they are in the ordinary song. If needful to strain a fanciful distinction, it might, perhaps, further be noted of these high-bred thrushes, that they differ slightly in appearance from the plain-song thrush, in being rather less stoutly built, with the colour of the back a richer brown, and the speckles on the breast more distinct.

The ordinary song of the Thrush consists of staccato passages irregularly varied, connected by occasional smoother notes, but wild and free, and liable to impromptu inflections; yet all through one particular spring I used to hear a wild thrush, perched in a favourite walnut tree, for

hours together introduce, with monotonous iteration, as a kind of chorus to his ordinary song the following notes,—



the tone and emphasis ludicrously resembling the human voice.

Not far from the walnut-tree, and within earshot of a poultry-yard, a tame thrush used to hang in his wicker cage outside a cottage door, whose favourite pastime was to imitate the agonised scream of a young chicken, and as the rogue did it only at long intervals he succeeded in causing the poultry maid many a needless alarm !

Another cage-thrush indulged, at rare intervals, in this absurd refrain,—



Along the sunny side of a meadow shaded by hedge-row elms, I used to hear the gallant Chaffinch, called by local bird-fanciers "Sweet Lancaster," piping his bold carol, the words wedded to the music thus,—first a bubbling trill "sweet" rapidly repeated five times "sweet-sweet-sweet-sweet-sweet"—a rest of half a note—a slur "swe-et," again—concluding with a falling strain, "Lan-cas-ter," three notes. Some years afterwards, when teaching bird-lore, I repeated to a little maiden the words of the cock chaffinch's song ; but presently, when we met with "Sweet Lancaster," like a herald in his red tabard blowing a jovial

blast, he was Lancaster Herald no longer, for his final cadence had only two notes and no word could we fit to it.

Along those same hedge-row elms the little Blue-Tit used to ramble rasping out his metallic squeak,—“te-tee’, te-tee’, te-tee’,” the people there calling him “*Sharp-Saw*,” very happily ; but often as I have met with him since elsewhere, I have never again heard so distinctly the mimic sound of saw-sharpening.

A familiar cadence of the Blackbird’s song curiously resembles its scientific name ;—blow those syllables with a soft and mellow quaver as through a silvern flute,—“mê-rû-lâ, mê-rû-lâ,” and you will recall to mind, perhaps, some tender hour of days gone by when the Merle’s sweet vesper hymn stole to your heart from the fading west. I have often noticed how in quiet hamlets a Blackbird will sing all through the season upon one particular tree—a thorn-bush, or an orchard apple. I had some business one evening at the house of a small dairy farmer on the borders of Somersetshire, and as I lingered with the good man a moment at the door, a beautiful Blackbird perched himself on the topmost spray of a young tree, within a few yards of our heads, and commenced his even-song ;—“There !” exclaimed my friend, “do ye hear un ? I would not have *he* shot—no, not for the best five-pound note that ever were made !” I found the bird was an established favourite, and I hailed the Farmer’s genial enthusiasm as a proof that a mind not over sentimental can be fully sensible to the charms of Bird-Music.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### MEAN OUTSKIRTS.



PERCHED on the edge of a wide table-land, a little town with dribblets of rugged habitations escaping along the western slopes ; down which, to an unaccustomed eye, there appears impending danger the central church with its surrounding buildings—the very heart of the town—may at any time, without further warning, suddenly slide. But the little town has clung to its rickety perch on the edge of the cliff for many centuries, so that the old inhabitants, rich in tradition if in nought else, are fully possessed with a placid confidence in the immutability of the old place and its old institutions, and deeply impressed with a weighty sense of their Borough's national importance, verily believing the corporation, with its mayor aldermen and twelve capital burgesses, to be a great bulwark of the State. One Member to the National Parliament is also returned by this ancient borough (ages ago it had its Folkmote as now its County Court) which circumstance affords no petty warrant for the pride of the old inhabitants, seeing that the privilege of having a representative in the Commons-House-of-Parliament is denied, in this great commercial kingdom, to great commercial towns whose exports reach the furthest quarters of the globe ; whereas the chief export of the little town is mouse-traps in small quantities to the villages, even more

primitive than itself, scattered round about: which old local interest the Representative pleasantly promises he will watch over when he gets up to Parliament in the great City of London!

The agricultural interest is naturally very powerful in and around the little town, and on market days quite overpowers the mouse-trap interest; but agriculture can scarcely be called a local interest, being almost as old and wide-spread as humanity itself;—nevertheless, the Member is too shrewd a judge not to keep friends with the farmers, and when he dines with them at the market ordinary, and utters the never-failing pledges, received with “hip-hip-hurrah and one cheer more,” it is a red-letter day indeed. A haunch of venison, or a salmon of almost fabulous weight—whichever may be in season—loads the groaning board on such occasions, the gracious gift of a Peer who feels a kindly interest in the welfare of the Commons; or a holocaust of hares and pheasants, slain by Mr. Hugh Crisp at behest of the great Baron, is solemnly delivered to Mr. Pursey, to be consumed on the altar of political consistency with time-honoured jovial rites.

But the agricultural interest, the mouse-trap interest, the “Member,” the twelve capital burgesses, and, indeed, the little town itself and all its inhabitants never appear to better advantage than on the great annual Cattle Show day, when all the various powers and interests assemble in the ancient streets and walk hurriedly to and fro, some up-hill, some down-hill, some round about as if nervously aware a great event were on the eve of being, but curiously uncertain where or how. If any solitary man walking leisurely



happen to meet a pair, or a triad or a group, moving quickly, whispering confidentially, and manipulating minatory sticks or whips, he can get no audience of them ; they push contemptuously past the listless man, or nudge him with a friendly laugh into the gutter ; but when two equally animated parties meet, they smite hands, and each interlocutor asks the other, confusedly, if he has " seen anything ? " The Secretary of the Farmers' Club, a commonplace man perspiring at every pore, pushes vaguely about, now fast, now slow, stunned by conflicting messages coming thicker and faster upon him, but sternly determined to do something by-and-bye. There is the Feeble Man, in a soft felt hat, who early in the morning unexpectedly meeting a neighbour and hard pushed for words having formulated on the inspiration of the moment a question, " Have you seen the second prize heifer ? I don't think she's—— ! " adheres to it all through the day ; and there is the Active Man, stout, in a low-crowned wide-brimmed beaver, who loudly declares he " sha'n't put up with it ! " and dashes heavily, wherever he can elbow his way through a crowd, in wrathful pursuit of the Secretary—whom he never succeeds in finding. There are the Street Boys, who whistle sharply at intervals and ask each other, " if it ain't a lark ? " and there are the Corner Loungers, who never get excited, but fall (drunk) at their accustomed posts towards the evening. Something definite crops up when the Twelve Capital Burgesses appear in marching order, and many leading mouse-trap makers and farmers stick closely to them as being now on the right scent ; but the procession comes to a check at the Show-Yard gates, for the judges have not yet quite made up their minds. At last, heralded by a

buzz of voices, the "Member" comes, and with him a Learned Friend from the heated atmosphere of the Law Courts, two aristocratic County Members, a courtesy Peer, and a *queue* of hangers-on ending with the perspiring Secretary, who flutters hat in hand after the Member, like the poor little cuckoo's man flitting feebly after his unwieldy charge. Now, at last, the climax is to be reached; the Capital Burgesses, the Member, the courtesy Peer, the Powers, the Interests form up and press forward, hemmed in by an increasing and converging crowd urged onward by its own momentum, but sternly kept at bay by two policemen, Mr. Hugh Crisp and his assistants in bright new suits of velveteen, the Town Crier, and the perspiring Secretary; when, just as the settled tramp of the column begins to wake the echoes in the shuttered shops of the mouse-trap makers, the exigent clangour of the dinner-bell is heard—a summons that must be obeyed!—and so the column breaks up, and melts away in a reflex wave towards the corridor of The Kepperyl Arms: already odorous of soup.

At these "Agricultural Dinners" gems of extra-parliamentary eloquence are hung upon "the line," like rejected Academy pictures making a brave show in a dealer's gallery; so that quiet subscribers to the local Reading Rooms, who constantly pore over the *Times*, wonder how it is they never see any of this fine talk in print; and some genial agriculturists, who honestly admire their chosen Member as a prince of men, conceive a dull suspicion that the "*Newspaper Gentlemen*" in London may not be fee'd sufficiently—and would willingly subscribe to some fund for the *proper* encouragement of impartial reporting could

they see their way. Under the sedative influence of a heavy dinner with tobacco smoke, no wonder the party politicians all consent to jog along cheerfully in the old family coach, rather than undergo the fatigue of tooling each his own glowing chariot: the Conservatism for the nonce is of the *liberal* and the Liberalism of the *moderate* type, and it is pleasant to note how the stock thunders, which wake a clattering echo down the tables, are greeted with quiet smiles upon the dais. A symposium with argument would be intolerable; and who cares to remember that simpletons may be sipping poison with their sherry!

About the hour when political coruscations are waning, and mild jokes on agricultural topics are being floated on the wings of song about the large Dining Room at The Kepperyl Arms, many country folks are travelling homewards from the Show Market; though some of them tarry yet awhile at a snug Hostelry of the humbler sort in the mean outskirts of the little town. It is seldom the habitual taciturnity of small farmers and labourers relaxes, but their tongues are unloosed to-day;—let us enter—we may chance to hear such home truths as are fished up from the bottom of the wine-cup!

The little Parlour is reeking with tobacco-smoke, but, as the eye becomes accustomed to the dense medium, the assembled company is seen to consist of a mixed assemblage of men with a few women;—some occupiers of the cottages grouped around the snug Hostelry, one or two little town householders escaped to a cool retreat from the heavier drama at the Kepperyl, but chiefly country folk “breaking” their homeward journey.

A Brass-faced Man from the Midlands, proprietor of a travelling "Emporium" now for a few days only stationed in the neighbourhood, is lounging at the bar window, puffing a full-flavoured cigar and chatting with the buxom landlady. He surveys the assembled microcosm of the local world on which at present he trades, with the contemplative eye of a judge of men; but confines his very candid conversation to themes of love and war, foreign politics, Shakespere, and the musical glasses. An aged crone hobbles in, with tall form bent beneath the weight of years, and flash of night-black eyes, sole relic of faded beauty, and sure index of that mother-wit which is the natural concomitant of physical perfection.

"Well, mother," says the Brass-faced Man, "what d'ye lack?"

"Nought of thee, Master Kettle-mender;—I'm looking for my Mary; mistress!"

"Your Mary!" rejoins the buxom landlady, "she's in the *House*, is n't she, Madge?"

"Yes; but they let her out to-day. She might have come to see her old mother before going to the Show Market, I think."

"I'm glad, ma'am, *you* are not in the 'House,'" remarks the Brass-faced Man, nowise abashed by the old lady's good-humoured rebuff, "I think most of you good people about these parts look upon 'the House' as a second Home?"

"Perhaps they do, sir; and perhaps it is not all their fault!" exclaims the landlady.

"No!" adds old Madge, "and I should be there myself this minute for no fault of mine that I know of, if it weren't for my Tom in Australia. Tom sends *me* something, but he will not send anything for Mary, because he wants us to go out there to him, and the Guardians will not allow Mary (though she is a widow) and her orphan children anything *out* of the House, because, as they say, she has friends well off! Australia is too far away—right through to the other side of the round world, they tell me, under my feet and that is too deep down for my poor old bones to go. And so my Mary dwells in the Union sooner than leave me alone in the world; and nothing can be made right until I'm dead and gone, and laid out quiet under the old yew tree, where I've danced many an hour when I was a maid."

"Here, mother," says the Brass-faced Man, puffing hard at his cigar, "have your draught with me, and tell us all your history!"

"Ah, good sir! what have I to tell ye?" sighs the old lady, "everybody hereabouts knows old Madge and all about her; when I was a giddy girl, and used to dance round the Maypole, here on the green before it was taken in, they used to crown me 'May Queen,' with bunches of primroses and plaits of green rushes; and many's the young farmer I might have had—but I loved my Jack the best. Repent? No, not I! My youngest boy, Jack, was just like *him*: only taller and handsomer. Five men-children I have brought into the world, thank God! and one daughter, poor Mary,—and now she's in the workhouse, and Tom in Australia, and I am a poor old widow left

alone ; yet, bless the Lord, I'm strong and only eighty-five,—stronger now than half the women no older than my Mary, that have been bred-up and now dwell in these stuffed-up places round here. My Jack and me dwelt in our own thatched cottage up yonder in the Chace, where we begot all our children : five tall lads and one pretty maid. Three of my sons died in battle, fighting for their country—too soon to earn any pension ; and Mary is left a widow with four young children in the workhouse ; and Dick, oh dear ! oh dear ! my rattlecap Dick—his blood was shed one black wild night in a fight with my lord's keepers !—I can never eat *rabbit* since, when they send round the dole at Christmas ; and I do not think the Magistrates and the Guardians will ever forget that job—they seem so hard upon us ! But my darling Jack was the flower of the flock !—six feet he stood, and his eyes were black—”

“ Black as your own, mother,” suggests the Brass-faced Man.

“ Ah ! sir, they used to tell me mine were black ; but my Jack's eyes were like the eyes of a handsome gypsy ! and he would back the wildest colt that ever farmer had for miles round here, and when he came home on furlough he'd whirl about his cavalry sabre round his curly head like the flickering of summer lightning ! Yes ! the girls—the girls ! 'Twas their fault—not his ! Milly was a soft-eyed meek-hearted thing, too quiet for our young Jack,—but she died broken-hearted—I'll say that for her !—when news came he was killed. 'T was in battle in India ;—the General, he made a blunder—and all our brave cavalry were cut to pieces ! Jack was ever rash for fighting ; and

so we never saw him more :—like all my other noble boys. The General was nothing done-to, for he was an Earl's son ; and he used to visit at my Lord's up here at our Great House. I saw him one day as I was a-gathering a few sticks under the Park wall—I mind it well ; it was a cold autumn day, and all about the battle had been forgotten, except by those who had to suffer ; he rode up to me and raised his hat, as he sat on his glossy-coated horse, showing his grey locks curling round his brow, and he says to me, 'Mistress !' he says, 'Is not your name —— ?' 'Yes, my Lord,' says I, dropping a curtsy. 'God bless you,' says he, 'let me have the honour to shake hands with you !' and he left a golden guinea in my palm. I could not help it ! I kissed his hand, same as the young gentlemen used to kiss mine when I was 'May Queen,' with a rush-crown on my head ; and he dug his heels into his charger and made him bound off quickly, while I turned, and like an old fool, my heart sunk down so !—I dropped a tear or two among the silly dry sticks. I thought—oh, dear !—of the bloody field in India, where the gallant General and my young Jack had fought together ! Could *he* but have ridden up alongside the old General if only for a moment—just for me to see him !—the great round-eyed child that used to tug so at my breast ! Parson ? well, I don't say much about parsons ; our last curate, before my young Jack enlisted, used to say we were 'a set of wild heathens ;' but *he* was a poor straight-haired 'molly-coddle' creature. The only parson I ever really liked was old Reverend —— ; *he* was a real gentleman. When me and my Jack had three or four sturdy boys round us in our cottage on the Chace, he would come and tole them off to

church on Sunday mornings, and then after prayers in the afternoons, he and they and all the farm lads would play cricket !”

A sudden altercation in another part of the room now attracts general attention: it is two “Dealers” wrangling over the result of some transaction in the Cattle-market before the Show took place in the morning. One of them is a little thin-faced man, with a peculiar roguish squint about one beady eye, the other being habitually half closed, while his interlocutor is a big tall portly man, with soft flaxen hair, a large red face, and a gentle lisping voice, like the voice of a bashful girl.

“I bought the bullock of Farmer White, I tell ye,” screams the Little Dealer, “for ten-pound-ten; I sold her, directly, to Jimmy Doddington for eleven-pound and a shilling to luck; and Jimmy Doddington sold her to George Parsons, that don’t often attend our market, for eleven-pound-fifteen dry money; and George Parsons he sold her to you for twelve-pound-five and two drops o’ gin; and you sells her to Farmer Black, that lives ’joining farm to Farmer White, for thirteen-pound-ten clean money. Now isn’t that it?” asks the Little Dealer fiercely, striking a lissom ash stick upon the floor.

“I sha’n’t argue any more about it,” replies the Big Dealer to the Little Dealer, “I give in, but now I’ll tell thee something. Farmer Black, that bought Farmer White’s cow off me at thirteen-pound-ten, Farmer White having sold her to you at ten-pound-ten, up here at Show Market—they, Farmer White and Farmer Black, living next door neighbours down yonder in the vale—is bound under his lease to sell no straw, but having more straw than he knew how to



use, and being very hard up for cash, got rid of two load of straw to Jerry Collins in a 'chop,' and drew four pound hard money to boot. Now the straw as Jerry got it from Farmer Black stood in Jerry just two pound, but he gets round Farmer Black to haul it home for him for nothing—and you know it's five miles from Farmer Black's to Jerry's—and then Jerry looks out for a customer for the straw, and hearing that Farmer White wanted some straw, he rides down to him, and sells the two load o' straw to Farmer White for eight pound, the farmer to haul it home, and he *did* haul it home, nearly back to the very place where it first came from."

"Ha-ha-ha!" roars the Brass-faced Man at the conclusion of this story, "a pretty set you dealers are—talk about *my* copper kettles—why if Farmer Black and Farmer White had only just looked over the gate, and managed that little bit of barter between themselves, I reckon they'd have saved each other a good deal of trouble, and been seven or eight pounds into pocket into the bargain!"

"Perhaps they might," says the Little Dealer, almost closing his *other* eye, "but if Farmer White and Farmer Black were so clever as *you*, how should we dealers live? Hey, brother?"

"And," adds a farmer sententiously, who sat in a corner, clothed in a voluminous smock frock, and silently smoking a long clay pipe, "ready money's useful."

"It is so, sir," retorts the Brass-faced Man, "but I don't care to pay cent-per-cent. for it myself. But, of course, there's no accounting for taste, and you farmers seem to be a peculiar lot."

"I believe farmers pay dearer for loan o' money at the

bank than anybody," remarks a sturdy better-class labourer, whom his comrades sitting with him on a bench near the table have been addressing as 'William.' "But a farmer need never want ready money so badly as many of his class do if only he took no more land than his own capital would stock. At the best of times many farmers have fields yielding no increase, but when seasons go against 'em, then there's acres after acres bringing 'em into debt, and pushing 'em down from bad to worse."

"Do'st thee know what thee'rt talking about?" growls the Smock-frock Farmer, from his corner.

"I think I do, master," is William's stolid answer. "I've worked a little bit o' land for myself 'most every year now for many years past, and I know by that experience what land will do and what it will not do; and I've worked for a good many farmers, and I know by keeping my eyes and ears open, where the shoe pinches them."

"Ah, 'tis bad when the shoe pinches," sighs a freckle-faced, broken-down looking farmer, who has just silently entered, and caught, as he sank into his seat, the conclusion of William's speech.

"Bad or not, I know a good many farmers that can only touch and go on four hundred acres of land; while I could live well on four only, if I had the chance and a fair start."

"That difference may all be owing to the *hunter*, the *port*, and the *piano*," says the Brass-faced Man.

"Not a bit of it," retorts William; "that isn't what I meant, the farmer is welcome to all *that* if he's earned it. What I *do* mean to say is, the chances are so much heavier against the farmer than against the likes o' me."

"How so?"

"Thus: suppose the four hundred acres let to one hundred labourers (not that I should think *that* the best plan) and there comes a bad season, they can't *all* go wrong. And if any one of these labourers loses half his crop, his greatest loss is the loss of his own sweat, and while waiting for another chance he can manage to rub along on a crust for a season. But if the farmer, tenant of the whole four hundred acres loses half *his* crop he is a ruined man. He has not only most likely lived on profits before he's earned them, but he has paid away money for wages that he can't get back again, and so he must call on Master Banker."

"And there he gets squeezed, Mister William."

"Six or seven per cent. is the lowest figure, and all these outgoings are certain things, while the crop is an uncertain thing."

"There's sense in what you say, William, and I begin to see it. If a farmer's head once drops under water, the nature of his occupation makes it a hard job for him ever to lift it out again. He hasn't the chance of lucky 'specs' turning up trumps like our big merchants."

"Nor can he turn his money, however well he turns it, much oftener than once a year."

"Right again! On the chance of *one* thing showing right side the ledger once a year, he has *two* or *three* other things dead certainties, running on from week to week, month to month, all entered on the wrong side. There's the mill-stone already tied round his neck, and if his Harvest

don't come and cut the knot with a bright sickle, down he plunges."

"'Tis a ten to one chance ag'in' him!" exclaims a little fellow, evidently a Jockey, who has been listening attentively to the dialogue.

"There is one weak point in your argument, William," resumes the Brass-faced Man. "Suppose the farmer hires enough labourers and sets 'em to dig each four acres?"

"I told ye I didn't think a hundred labourers on the four hundred acres the best plan. But, just to fall in with your humour, we'll suppose the farmer *did* act as you say—and he *might* as a 'pig might fly'—yet *it would n't answer*."

"How so?"

"Because the *best hired* labour (supposing him able to get the best) is not the very best."

"Why not?"

"Ah! now thour't above me. I'm not able to tell thee, but it *is* so; and depend upon it there's reason for it. And no shame to the hireling neither; he's same as God made him, and he can n't help it!"

"You should 'a been a parson, mate," remarks the Jockey.

"I once heard a good parson preach a good sermon," says William, declining a direct retort, "and he kept on, all through his discourse, repeating '*try the power o' love*,'—now, that's the power used to bind old-fashioned folk together—squire, farmer, labourer—who used to work on the land. But——"

"It's gone, now!" ejaculates the Brass-faced Man.

"Gone!" says William, with a mournful shake of the head.

"Struck out, sir," exclaims the jockey.

"If ever the Agricultural Interest be to be set right again in our country, we must hark back somewhere on to the old lines," adds William. "Somewhere where that feeling, or the next best thing to it, is to be found."

"Hum!" mutters the Brass-faced Man, gazing curiously into the glowing ash on to the end of his cigar.

At this juncture an inquiry begins, as to the worst possible conditions under which Land can be occupied solely for Agricultural purposes, discarding all other considerations, in which William, the Brass-faced Man, and the Jockey are the chief speakers. But as the opinions of the Big Dealer, the Little Dealer, the Broken-down Farmer, and the Landlord are also freely expressed, and an occasional "humph" contributed by the Smock-frock Farmer, the discussion waxes warm, resulting in much noise and some laughter, until, as if to quell a possible disturbance, the Brass-faced Man, in a voice of authority, demands that the Landlord's slate be brought forth. Upon this innocent tablet, with accompaniment of husky whisperings, irrepressible snorts of glee, and solemn consultations, by laborious wear of chalk and application of moistened finger, they succeed in producing, as their final arbitrament, a curious kind of written diagram, of which this following is a faithful copy, save that local names (the spelling out of which, as the original was handed round the room, produced bursts of merriment) and sundry artistic sketches by the Jockey, are omitted.

THE LANDOWNER,

ARISTOCRATIC AND IDLE ;

who gives his  
orders  
to

THE STEWARD,

SEMI-ARISTOCRATIC AND SEMI-IDLE,

the distorting medium through which alone  
the opinions and actions of the Land-  
owner can be known to those  
below, to whom the truth  
is so vitally im-  
portant ; who  
pays

THE STEWARD'S CLERK,

the only practical man above  
the Farmer, who has views  
of his own, but conveys  
to the tenant the  
views of others  
twice fil-  
tered.

THE FARMER,

TENANT OF EIGHT HUNDRED ACRES

of Land, and therefore Entitled  
to be a Gentleman, or  
semi-idle, who gives  
directions  
daily  
to

THE BAILIFF,

the practical man  
below the farmer,  
who in turn  
directs  
all

THE LABOURERS,

who alone  
till

*The Land.*

"There," says the Brass-faced Man, recovering the slate, at length, and carefully with his coat-sleeve expunging the diagram, "that appears to me exactly the way 'how *not* to do it.' But by the aristocratic method, no doubt, the 'crop' is a secondary consideration."

"You've put down a goodish many drones that suck a living out of the land," timidly remarks the Broken-down Farmer, "but not got 'em all."

"Perhaps not, brother," replies the Brass-faced Man, cheerfully. "I've read somewhere about learned men discussing the question, how many angels can dance on the point of a needle ;—how many idle folks dance on an acre of land is a similar subject. Of course you'll say there's the Parson, the Game-keeper, the Tax-gatherer, in addition to the Steward, the Bailiff, my Lord, and the rest that our little friend sketched on the slate just now. But let that slide ; and just hearken, all of you, a moment, and I'll tell you what I've been thinking since we've been discussing the Land Question so freely."

"What ?" asks the Jockey.

"Farming, sir, is the best trade in England."

"Humph !" exclaims the taciturn One in the smock.

The Broken-down Farmer emits a dolorous groan.

"You may 'humph' and you may 'groan,'" cries the Brass-faced Man, warmly, "but I'm sure of this, if any other business had ever been conducted under such restrictions and such conditions as Farming is in this country (I don't say there are no exceptions, mind !) there would have been universal bankruptcy in that business long before this. And that Farmers—taking the average of all the country

through—have done so well as they have done, proves, I say, that on its merits Farming must be an exceptionally good business !”

“Look at the seasons !” cries the Broken-down Farmer.

“Look at the sea !” retorts the Brass-faced Man. “It is not you nor I, my friend, can rule the seasons or the waves; but it is our duty to regard them. A Liverpool ship-owner, in a large way, is his own under-writer. Any way, no Liverpool merchant, large or small, trusts his capital to the mercy o’ the winds and waves without making provision against shipwreck. So should the farmer reckon for bad seasons. Four seasons following all bad for agriculture don’t happen above once in a century ; —an occasional bad season should be provided against ; and Rent—and, for the matter o’ that, Tithe—should row on the same bottom as the farmer’s profits.”

“Hear, hear !” exclaims William.

“Hear, hear, to you !” says the Broken-down Farmer.

“Yes, William,” resumes the orator, “I sometimes take a partner for a spell o’ trade. Suppose we do in Staffordshire goods or a bit o’ glass. ‘Well,’ says I, ‘put by so much for breakages first—for breakages will happen in the best-regulated caravans when they’re loaded with glass—then you and I’ll go shares alike in any profit we may make afterwards. I don’t think I should quite feel I was doing myself justice to go giving my partner a safe and certain ten-per-cent, and *me* take all the risk. ‘No !’ I should say. ‘Partner, if you want *that*—your share, whether we make any profit or not—we must strike the average of a run o’ years. You must stick to me through



half a dozen journeys, at least, and I must see if I can allow you an assured *five* per cent.' "

"But," suggests William, "suppose your partner and his friends held in their hands all the potteries and all the pot-shards in Staffordshire?"

"I see what you're driving at," replies the Brass-faced Man, cooling down a little, and thoughtfully stroking the bridge of his nose. "*That* might make it awkward!"

"The Landlords in some districts can fix the rent how they like, and if one man won't pay it, why another will; so you must either take your chance or starve," remarks the Broken-down Farmer.

"That was a tidy rent *you* paid for your last place, governor," says the Big Dealer.

"Well, if it was," replies the Broken-down Farmer, "it's no concern of yours, perhaps. But as we be friends here all together, and speaking our minds, I'll just tell ye the whole truth about that business."

"Don't, neighbour!" ejaculates the Smock-frock Farmer. "There never used to be so much talk about our private affairs as there is now."

"That was when Farmers were all doing well," answers William to the last speaker, with a meaning smile.

"Now, listen to me," begins the Broken-down Farmer. "You all know Lord Oldanbare's steward; *his* sieve's a cruel one for a poor tenant to be riddled through! Lord Oldanbare, himself, is in his station as poor as I am in mine—that's poor enough, God knows! Yet Lord Oldanbare, with only six or seven farms to let, does not transact

his own business, but pays a steward to do it for him. Why, with his narrow income, his lordship incurs that useless expense, is best known to himself; to me it appears unreasonable."

"It *does* appear unreasonable, on the face of it," remarks the Big Dealer; but, in fact, *perhaps it mid be, perhaps it mid not*. I live, as you be aware, close to Lord Oldanbare's estate, and I've known his lordship since he was a boy. I don't expect his lordship could tell you himself exactly why he employs Old Skinflint; 'tis not for want of knowledge, for my lord's a better judge of stock than Skinflint, I know, and I believe he understands land quite as well; but you see Skinflint was agent to his father before him, and 't-isn't every teamster who drives a team can see the quickest way to get a waggon wheel out of a rut. But *I* can give ye two good reasons why my Lord Oldanbare, poor as he is, pays a stiff yearly salary to Jasper Skinflint, *Es-quire* for doing work his lordship is quite able, in one sense, to do himself."

"Let us have them," says William.

"Simply thus," replies the Big Dealer, counting the "reasons" off on his fore-finger—"one, Lord Oldanbare has gotten (at bottom) a kind heart; two, he's desperate poor!"

"That *is* a queer tip!" exclaims the Jockey; "a kind heart employs a cruel agent—a poor lord flings his coin away!"

"Hold, Little One," replies the Big Dealer, "let me explain. Lord Oldanbare's eyes, mayhap, have never been opened to the cruelty, and he *thinks* he gains by paying the salary."

"Suppose we give the noble lord the benefit of the doubt," suggests William ; "but I should like to know one thing—how is it his lordship *is* so poor ? "

"Through no particular fault of his," replies the Big Dealer ; "if his lordship was stiff-loined enough to make himself a yeoman (same as his ancestors were long ago, I've heard say) and till his own land he'd be happy enough ; but he's the victim o' family greatness, and inherits his difficulties through two or three generations. The lawyers have dealt with that moderate estate as if 't were a gold mine, and his lordship's poor shoulders be so hung round with legacies and settlements that he can hardly see his way clear how to pay ready-money for a washing bill. *That* is why he wants Skinflint—or *thinks* he wants him. Do you see it, Little One ? "

"I *believe* I do," says the Jockey dubiously.

"A dealing man must live," resumes the Big Dealer, "I know that by experience, and I suppose so must a lord. But if by stepping down the ladder a round or two I had the chance of getting into as soft a bed as Lord Oldanbare might lie on, I think I should step down ; but all that's a matter o' speculation. As things be, 'tis a desperate case with my lord : rent he must have, and old Skinflint is the very man to get it for him."

"They always let their farms by tender," says the Broken-down Farmer.

"By public advertisement asking for tenders," adds William.

"That's exactly it," resumes the Broken-down Farmer ; "I'd had a run of constant bad luck, such as a poor mortal

couldn't stand against, for over three years, and was left in such a fix I was just desperate. I saw an advertisement in the '*Western Carrier Pigeon*,' of a farm to be let of two hundred acres, 'tenders, postage paid, to be addressed to Jasper Skinflint, Esquire.' 'Twas a long way off from my neighbourhood, nobody would know me, and so on the off-chance I slipped in a tender, with a reference to my own brother-in-law, who held a bill-of-sale on what few 'sticks' I had got."

"At how much an acre?" asks William.

"Four pounds."

"Four pounds an acre!" exclaims William, "why that's as much as we poor labourers have to pay when *we* want to rent a small bit o' land."

"Any-how, I got the place," says the Broken-down Farmer; "I couldn't lose anything for I hadn't a mag in the wide world, and there was the off-chance I might be lucky enough to get a good crop, and then——"

"A good crop, ha! ha!" roars the Big Dealer; "ye surely never saw the land! I suppose thou hast some knowledge o' farming?"

"Perhaps I *have*; but I never saw the land before I tendered—not I! My brother-in-law saw it, I think; but the journey would have cost me a pound, and a penny stamp was all I meant to risk. There was no question asked of me, and I was let in as easy as a lobster into a pot."

"Well, had ye seen it," says the Big Dealer, "unless ye knew no more about land than Jack Tar's parrot did about talking, ye would never have offered four shillings, much

less four pounds, an acre rental upon any off-chance of getting a profit the first year by honest tillage. Why, for twenty years past no tenant has stayed a fourth part of his term upon that farm—always getting the worst of it with old Skinflint, and going away shorn—and during the last four years there 's been no less than three tenants (by some shifting and juggling) every man of 'em putting nothing into the soil and trying to squeeze something out of it."

"I saw it all before I'd been in possession a week," resumes the Broken-down Farmer; "my dream about the chance of a plumping harvest was dissolved like a summer morning's fog in the vale. I got credit for what I wanted where I could—there be people, corn dealers, manure merchants, and others, who will always give an incoming tenant credit on the off-chance—and I made everything over to my brother-in-law, who paid his cheque for my first half-year's rent. But in my case the crash came pretty quick. I never stood quite a twelve-month."

"And how about the balance of Lord Oldanbare's rent?" asks the Jockey.

"Dost thee not know the law?" retorts the Broken-down Farmer. "Why, if the law did not give the landlord first claim for rent, do you think such men as Jasper Skinflint, Esquire, would be able to make it a paying game to let beggared-out land at four pounds an acre to a stranger?"

"What do *you* think of it, my Little One?" asks the Brass-faced Man of the Jockey, with meaning emphasis upon his words, and a sarcastic twinkle in his eye.

"Think of it! why I think it was a precious *gamble* all

round," says the Jockey ; " if some of my masters could get the loan of a landed estate they'd do well at it."

" Yes, but," adds William, with a grave face, " it is the law enables the landlord, or his steward for him—for it's all the same—to gamble with loaded dice, and drowning men catching at any straw, like our friend here, to keep honest folk off the land ; and so tradespeople make bad debts, a poor nobleman and a sharp agent pocket the rents, and good husbandry is ruined."

The Brass-faced Man growls a surly " Hum," and, taking his cigar out of his mouth, gazes very curiously indeed at its glowing ash.

" And what be ye thinking, neighbour, of doing for a living next ? " asks William, of the Broken-down Farmer.

" I think I shall emigrate."

" Emigrate ! You ben't fond enough of hard work to emigrate. But why not, if you've really made up your mind to rough it, get your brother-in-law to help you once more, and take some little place—eight or ten acres—in this country, and work with your own hands upon that."

" Oh, lord ! a fine lot of help and credit I should get if I did *that*. Why the people round would think me mad ! "

" Ah, that is where the mischief is," murmurs William, with a shake of the head ; " in this country manual labour is looked upon as degrading. Now, I've heard say, in America a farmer 'll drive plough all day, and then go home and dress for dinner like a lord ; it may be true or not true—I can't say ; but that's the sort of spirit we must have in our country if we mean not to be beaten by the Yankees."

"I tell you what I've been thinking about you, sir," says the Brass-faced Man, with a sarcastic intonation in his voice, looking at the Broken-down Farmer rather severely.

"What?" asks that individual, quailing beneath the gaze directed upon him.

"I've been thinking, that it is a pity you were not born into a title!"

"Come, now! none o' your chaff. What should *I* do with a title?"

"Why, you're just the sort o' man to make profitable use of a title. A title is a nice inheritance for an idle man."

"I can't think what you are driving at."

"Then I'll tell ye, man. If *you* had a title, you would make a living by letting it out on HIRE! Don't stare so! it's true. I know one or two very high sounding titles—genuine articles too!—to be seen on "prospectuses" got up by individuals in whose company we Brummagem chaps should button up our pockets: and as I understand the matter, the gentlemen whom those titles adorn derive an income from such transactions."

The rustics ranged around gaze at the speaker as if they expected the earth to yawn and swallow him up.

"Well," murmurs a Slender Tradesman, from the little Town, venturing to break the silence, "I once had twenty pounds which I had saved up for my daughter Alice, who is lame. Just as I and my wife were puzzling our brains day by day how best to invest the money, there came one morning to my door, by the postman, a large printed letter, stating, in the most obliging way, how money ought to be

invested in the Argentiferous Mines in Trincomalee. 'Look here, mistress,' said I, after examining the packet carefully and reading it all through, 'this must be a missive from Providence! If we send the twenty pounds to the Argentiferous Mines in Trincomalee, our Alice, in a few years, perhaps, need not crawl about on crutches, but will be able to ride at her ease in a comfortable pony carriage.'

"'Be careful, George,' says the little wife, 'for poor Alice's sake.'

"'I *am* careful, mistress,' says I; 'look here, it is perfectly correct, for there is Lord Alsace and Lorraine's name to it. You know? down here at Blunderbore Castle in Blankshire!'

"'George,' says the little wife, 'don't make fun in such a serious matter.'

"'I should be sorry to make fun,' says I; 'here take the paper and read for yourself, little woman;' and my mistress, who is a better scholar, and also wiser, if possible, than myself, she took the printed paper and read it all out; there it was looking quite noble:—'The Right Honourable the EARL of ALSACE and LORRAINE, Blunderbore Castle, Blankshire, *Chairman*.'

"'Oh, George!' says my little woman, letting the paper drop, and clapping her hand to her side to keep her heart still, 'it must be right with my lord's name to it. Do send the money up to London at once. Oh! thank God for this!'

"'And you sent up the money?'" asks the Brass-faced Man.



"I sent up Alice's twenty pounds to London, to be invested in the Argentiferous Mines in Trincomalee."

"Ah!"

"And we never saw a farthing of it back again!"

"All lost?"

"Yes, all lost! But we did not let Alice be the loser, and she a cripple! I hope the twenty pounds we lost did my Lord good, or whoever had it; but the next twenty pounds we saved for Alice we had to get together by close pinching. Many a short meal and thin clad back I and my wife and the rest of the children had for more than two years, until we had gotten Alice her twenty pounds again."

"And what did you do with that, sir?" asks William.

"We put *that* in the Savings Bank, and there it is now I'm happy to say, with a pound or two of interest added."

"Well, that's a plain story," says William, rising and holding out his broad palm, "and if you have no objection I should like to feel your fist, sir. But we must not be rash, and blame *all* for the faults of a *few*. There be noblemen good and bad, same as there be good and bad of all classes. I heard a sound only yesterday of a young Nobleman, who manages his own affairs, and lets out his land to industrious people in ten or twelve acre plots; which (if it be true, as I hope it is) is news that puts one in good heart, brother, and makes one have faith, there must be good days in store for Old England yet."

"Hear, hear, William!" exclaims the Brass-faced Man, "that's spoken like a man! That's a sort o' sentiment I

drink to ; but I do detest your rose-water moralists who seem to think a coronet crowns all the virtues, and all the vices are hidden under 'Hodge's' frieze coat."

"I don't care to hear such talk," growls the Smock-frock Farmer, shifting uneasily in his corner ; "if the noble Lords be not kept up in their station, what's to become o' us?"

"You are afraid of having to walk alone!" retorts the Brass-faced Man. "Well, if I had never grown out of leading-strings, I suppose I should be the same."

"As for labourers," continues the growler, "they be more and more lazy every year—a useless lot."

"Because you don't pay them wages enough."

"Wages enough! They gets more wages than they earns."

"Just so. Cause and effect—acting and re-acting, and all in the wrong direction."

"How so?"

"That is a long story, master. I cannot find time to answer you now ; we must argue it out our next journey. But it is certain your prize horses seem more fit for work than your prize labourers ; you do not seem to put it into your men, and I can quite believe you do not get it out of them."

"T's n't to be got out of a creatur' by cursing and swearing," says, in a tremulous pipe, an Aged Labourer, crouched on the bench near William.

"No, it is not," says William, briskly facing round to the Aged One ; "you be right, there, Gaffer."

"There is not much else but cursing and swearing, I'm

afraid, now-a-days—according to all I do hear,” murmurs the Slender Tradesman.

“Prizes are no good,” exclaims the Brass-faced Man, “such as I saw given away up yonder at the dinner. A prize of ‘One pound two shillings and sixpence given for long servitude,’ and ‘breeding up a family of children without relief from the poor’s rates,’ sounds something like a mockery.”

“Were ye at the dinner, sir?” pipes Gaffer; “did ye see *me* there, sir?”

“I did, old gentleman; and I thought your prize of twenty-five shillings not much of a plaister for your poor old back, bent double.”

“’T were not for me, sir, but for my son, Dickey; head prize for farm-lads who’ve never had but one master;—why head prize for a sow and pigs is only four guineas! Dickey, he is a good boy, the last child my old woman bore me, likely to be a man growed come another summer or so. Dickey do not run after neither girls nor drink. He’ve a-wrought thirteen years for Farmer Brown, and next Easter-tide he’ll be twenty, and never had no other master but Farmer Brown; he do say, ‘I do love Muster Brown.’ A-why, he’s stronger growed a’ready than I be, and earns his eighteen-pence a day; he brings it *all* to me, else we shouldn’t keep off the parish, for I be not able to work *much* now-a-days, not myself.”

“I should think not, with that back,” remarks the Brass-faced Man.

“And mis’ess, she be in the churchyard,” adds Gaffer, in tremulous tones; “but Dickey, my son, he be a good

simple boy, and he do tidy up our little cot after he comes home from work, almost so well as a woman."

"He must be a Molly-Coddle, then!" exclaims neat-handed Phyllis, warmly, as she places on the table a cup of sparkling cider.

"Don't interrupt the old gentleman, my dear," says the Brass-faced Man, tempering reproof with admiration.

"No—you come here, Phylli," bawls one of a group of rustic youths seated round a side table; on which rude altar he and his companions are pouring out libations to Freyja, mingling the rites with horrid ale-bench slang it curdles one's blood to hear.

"He says to me," resumes the trembling Gaffer, "'twas this very night fortnight—he says to me, as he lifted the pot off the fire, he says to me, 'Father,' speaking soft like, 'Father,' he says, 'they be going to give me a prize—one pound five shillings—for thirteen years con—con something, I can't say it—service.'

"'Never!' says I.

"'Yes,' says Dickey, 'tis true, father. Muster Brown, he's a good master, and when I asked him to rise me my wages, he said he shouldn't do it, not yet; but he'd get me a prize out o' the Ag-ri-cultural Society, and then I could wait for more wages till next hay-sel; and he went straightway and entered me, and now I be got to have it.'

"'Oh, lord! Dickey,' says I, 'what amazin' luck! What shall we do with it all?'

"'That's to be seen,' says my son, for he's a boy of great wisdom when 's put to it. 'We must think it all over,' says

he ; 'but I shall buy a good warm blanket for your bed for this winter, father—that's one thing for certain,' says my son ; 'and there's the little bill owing at the shop, I must pay that off.'

" 'God bless thee, Dickey ! ' says I.

" 'Then,' says he, 'I sha'n't lose a day's work to go to the Show ; you must go and get the prize for me, father.'

"And," adds the old man, "I've been and got it ; here it is," and he displays something knotted tight in the corner of a kerchief. "I be to wait here for Dickey till he comes along homewards and calls for me, for they have wrought an extra job at Farmer Brown's to-day, and Dickey, he's to have a cup of cider given him."

"So that is your story, old gentleman," exclaims the Brass-faced Man. "Now let me speak a moment. I sat at the dinner up yonder near one of the judges ; after the labourers had received their prizes we had this conversation—

" 'Did you ever see a ship in full sail ? ' I asked.

" 'Only once.'

" 'What tack was she sailing on ? ' "

" 'Eh ? ' "

" 'I see you don't understand. A vessel tacks when she's sailing on a head wind. That's just the farmer's position of late years—they've been trying to make head-way against an adverse wind. Now, there's a wrong tack and a right tack, and should a vessel on a lee shore sail the wrong tack, she runs a risk of shipwreck.'

" 'What's that to do with us, sir ? ' "

" 'Just this—the farmers are on the wrong tack with respect to the labourers.'

" 'How so ?'

" 'Instead of trying by every art in their power to lessen their labour bill, the farmers should try to increase it.'

" 'You talk like a madman, sir! The cost of labour is more now than we can afford to pay.'

" 'But suppose you were relieved from payment of Poors'-Rates?'

" 'Ah! that result is a long way off.'

" 'So is New York, when an Atlantic liner is just clearing the Mersey. But it is well to know where you are sailing to, and to begin your voyage by putting your vessel's head in the right direction.'"

At this moment there is a further influx of visitors—a small but noisy group, who have evidently adjourned hither from the Show dinner—and one of them especially, a powerfully built young fellow, a village politician, is not only inspired with wine, but intoxicated by the extra-parliamentary eloquence to which he has been listening. Prior to the entrance of this party, the Brass-faced Man was talking a little politics of a *liberal* cast, in which he was cheerfully supported by the Slender Tradesman, and it is amusing now to note the comical expression on that worthy's face as he hears the Slender Tradesman obsequiously supporting the Village Politician in his rabid personal abuse of Liberal Statesmen, and vapid laudation of Tory ministers. The Brass-faced Man is evidently about addressing a sarcastic remark to the Slender Tradesman ;

but being a kind-hearted man, and divining the situation, he turns him instead to the Buxom Landlady, and whispers an inquiry in her ear.

"He is one of 'THE PARTY,'" murmurs the Landlady, with bated breath.

"The party?"

"Yes, sir, the Village Politician is one of our Great Baron's retainers."

"P-u-u-uf," says the Brass-faced Man, politely directing a thin stream of cigar smoke away from the Landlady's face. "I see—I see it all." These worthy people put on their political opinions as a flunkey dons his livery. Faugh!" expanding his broad chest with a sonorous sigh of relief, "I suppose, old gentleman"—this in a loud audacious voice, turning towards the Aged Labourer—"you'll know what to do with it when, by-and-by, you get your right to vote?"

"I shall never need to vote, sir; my son Dickie *mid*."

"And how about Dickie?"

"Why, Dickey's an understanding young man," chirps Gaffer, cheerfully, "and he'll vote as Farmer Brown do tell him, or as our *Master* here most likely 'll tell him," humbly touching his forelock to the Village Politician.

"Foh!" says the Brass-faced Man, "what a salubrious atmosphere it is about here!" and he appears to struggle in his breathing as if he were near the mouth of some choking fiery furnace.

At this instant there falls upon the noisy assembly a sudden silence—stilled is each tongue, subdued the noise

of clinking cups, the monotonous puffing of silent pipes alone smites the ear, while answering glances wander furtively about the room, or set uneasily in the direction of the half-open door. It is the sort of electrical alarm which stills a rabbit warren when watchful bunny signals "*ferret*."

"Won't you come in, sir?" says the Buxom Landlady, turning cheerfully round, and adroitly affecting to be instantly aware of some person standing in the shadow behind her. And so, not to put too fine a point upon it, assuming (with indifferent success) an easy, nonchalant air, in glides the oily figure of Mister Doublehook.

The group of rustic youths hurriedly finish their libations to Freyja, and stream down the passage to the outer door, where, after the manner of cart colts, they indulge in horse-play;—we hear cries in the street, followed by a clattering of retreating hobnails; when in rushes the Landlord telling the Aged Labourer his son is in custody.

"My son Dickey? Oh, my son!" exclaims the trembling Gaffer, hurrying out as fast as his spindle shanks will allow him; and we follow to ascertain the truth, and if need be to assist the old gentleman.

This is what has happened. A policeman, lying *perdu* to watch the house, sees a sudden rout of bacchanals; there is a riotous noise, and a scuffle; whereupon, the guardian of the peace stepping forward, the rustic youths vanish, and poor Dickey is left as lawful prize. Explanations follow; but there is the patent fact, Dickey has been drinking—that eleemosynary cup of cider from good Farmer Brown is Dickey's undoing.



At a subsequent Petty Sessions, Dickey duly appeared, and the Policeman testified against him ; but on the production of an excellent character from Farmer Brown, the Chairman mercifully inflicted a mitigated fine of one shilling—with nine shillings added costs. And so poor old Gaffer did *not* get a good warm blanket for his winter bed.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### WHAT SHALL WE DO?



ONSTRAINED by reverence for the true ideal of Reform (the active spirit of which, when perfect, is constructive) rather than by serious hope of presently accomplishing anything practically formative, beyond mere approach towards some tentative suggestions, the writer ventures—as far as may be done in a few final pages—to point out one possible mode of improving the present aspect of our Rural Polity. Previous utterances will have shown that while from experience he is painfully aware of some of the blots on our present system, he has no faith in the efficacy of startling revolutions. Several causes, foremost among which may be mentioned the quickening (demonstrated by strikes) among the Agricultural Labourers in 1872 and subsequent years, the wretched weather of 1879 and bad harvests of that and immediately preceding years, and the severe competition of American with home-grown wheat in our markets, have combined to expose the weak points in our system of land tenure and agriculture. We are hurried by fate into the freshet of change, with the *débris* of centuries rudely laid bare around us; but the genius of the English people is to cling fast hold to rooted precedent, planting the feet with caution beyond defined limit of beaten track

so that a safe reform, for us, consists in circling round, with increment of light, to what has been before, rather than a rocket flight at a tangent into doubtful realms.

Accepting, without cavil, the famous basis of *three*—Land-owner, Tenant-farmer, and Labourer—let a moment's consideration be given to their present position. Complaints, vexing the public ear, have been heard from all three, but from the landlord class the cry has come less loudly than from the other two ; yet during this passing period of agricultural depression and agitation, the personal sufferings of many members of the higher class have been and must be severe. No position can well be conceived more painful than that of an aristocrat born to great estate in land suddenly confronted by difficulties with which he has never learnt to cope ; yet public sympathy goes not heartily with such a man : there is a suspicion that hitherto he has held the best end of the stick, and some are unfeeling enough to view his miseries with grim satisfaction—it is hoped the lesson may do him good. It certainly behoves the landed aristocracy to work cordially with the other classes concerned, so as to effect some necessary reforms with as little friction as possible, if they would avoid ultimate loss of dignity, or more serious possible penalties.

The woes of the farmer, as such are wont to be, have been proclaimed in the market-place. As a class (admitting the existence of many bright exceptions) the farmers, while often complaining, have not been perspicuous in statement of grievances nor unanimous as to proposals of remedy, so that should the stern teaching of present necessity have no further immediate effect than to brighten and consolidate their opinions, it will not prove an unmixed evil. That the

farmer should be placed, or should place himself, in a position of greater independence in his connexion with the landlord, and of greater cordiality in his connexion with the labourer is imperatively necessary, and some serious blundering in both directions may not be beyond the reach of speedy repair; but granting improved conditions for outlay of capital—a clear field and no favour, the one serious question to be asked is, can farming under any conditions in this country be now made to pay? Is the game worth the candle?—that is the question! Protection is still the Jack-o'-lantern of some benighted minds; with eyes fixed on one large interest alone, they heed not the difficulties into which, under such guidance, still larger interests would be plunged. We might as well resuscitate the gruesome hyperbole of corn-law-agitation days, and ask to have the counties *paved*, as to press in the opposite direction for our fields to smile (as smile undoubtedly they might) by the aid of protection. We are left, then—failing protection, failing the pavement—with our fields to cultivate, and face to face with America. In such a situation it is best to narrow our issues; and of this we may at once make certain, if *high* farming will not pay, then *poor* farming most assuredly will not. Is there, then, any kind of high farming both efficient and cheap? Yes, spade husbandry. But as well might we hope for British agriculture fostered by protection, or for the counties neatly covered down with paving stones, as for an England all cut up into cabbage gardens. We cannot make a Belgium of England if we would; a safer salvation is to be wrought by some pleasant compromise, and this leads direct to our project: of which more anon.

Our agricultural labourers, as a class, are *relatively* the lowest in the world. This is a bold assertion ; but seeing that our upper and middle classes may fairly claim universal supremacy in respect of intellectual culture and material prosperity combined, while our peasantry are absolutely inferior in almost every condition to the same class in many other European countries—France, Belgium, the Swiss Cantons—it is capable of being sustained. The contrast between the lavish wealth of our highest and the sordid penury of our lowest class is too vivid ; and the constant contemplation of it, without any attempt at amelioration by national or sustained effort, has blunted our moral sense. In the counties, where this contrast is intensified by the survival of the feudal spirit, the aspect of things, to an impartial observer, is still more painful. But though here and there we meet with minds fully informed with the painful knowledge of this national reproach, it is singular to note how a kind of blanket of darkness appears to stifle public discussion of the subject. Is it that the comfort of so many classes is concerned in keeping things as they are, while the class that suffers most is the only inarticulate one ? If so, then our shame is greater. Our labourers are what our system has made them, and when in 1872 the world was startled by the phenomenon of the English labourer's voice, instead of scoffing, as we did, at the rudeness of his speech and the absurdity of his demands, it would have been well could the classes above him have treated him as a wise parent would a fractious child who justly complained. Above all, we ought to have rejoiced that our rural labouring classes could show such proof of manhood, for it is just that quality which

needs most to be developed in him. The same causes which, in the course of the few ensuing years, suddenly impoverished the farmers, stifled the cries of the labourers ; but let not any one deceive himself that present stillness of the surface indicates surcease of fermentation : the process is still going on, and will continue to go on ; but the ultimate ebullition need not be terrible, if wisely met.

Now let us briefly glance at some desirable reforms and ameliorations as they would affect each of our three classes. First, the Land-owner. It certainly may be conceded that the law of entail and the custom and practice of settlement, as they tend to prevent the proprietor dealing freely with his land in the best and cheapest way to make its cultivation profitable, should be checked and amended. Respecting these hindrances to free dealing with land, it is stated (chiefly by persons interested in maintenance of class privilege) they are imaginary rather than real ; if indeed so, then general and lucid demonstration of the fact is most desirable. Property, as defined by law, is divided into realty and personalty, and it certainly does appear strange, to the lay mind, that an owner may deal with his realty as if it were more personal to him than his personalty. A spendthrift may, in a sense, devour the crops that have yet to be sown a century hence ; but a miser may not control prospectively for three generations the guineas he has hoarded. The fact that a class, for selfish purposes, should lay so heavy a hand upon the earth on which their fellow creatures are born and have to live, certainly conflicts with the finer sense of moral law, however the practice may be guarded by statute and legalised by custom. If rent, the same as wages, could be made more elastic, de-

pendent more on the vicissitudes of seasons, so that land-owner, tenant-farmer, and labourer should row, as it were, in the same boat, that alone would go far towards reducing the practice of encumbering land : for it is evident it is not land but the usufruct that is encumbered. Suppose, by some sudden stroke, a country to become sterile ; what then would be the value of all the entails, settlements, and dowers ? The simple truth is, lawyers and usurers, for centuries past, relying on the stable value of realty, have been able, with seeming fair success, to indulge the landed aristocracy in vain practice of that proverbially impossible feat, to "*eat your cake and have it ;*" but recent events, showing how precarious a thing rent may become, will guide us into safer and simpler courses for the future. With respect to Game, the injury done to farm crops by game, as affecting the tenant-farmer, is a matter now in some fair way of final settlement ; but there is another aspect of that question, the Game *Laws*, affecting the well-being of the labourer, which cannot be viewed with complacency. The Game Laws are an unmixed evil, and will assuredly, before many years are over, come to be remembered with astonishment equal to that we now feel when reminded that sixty years ago people were hung by the score for robbery. That Game, as the occasion and object of legitimate sport, should be preserved, cannot but be the ardent wish of all who appreciate the charms of country life ; but everything necessary in that respect could be insured by the ordinary laws protecting property, including the law of trespass, and by the institution of a close time under the operation of an Act similar to the Wild Birds Protection Act. The operation of the Game Laws furnishes the greater part of the seeming

cheap work done by country Justices, and with the abolition of those laws their occupation would be almost gone ; while the absurdity of bestowing a qualification, which should be *mental*, by mere accident of ownership of land would then become more glaringly apparent. A virgin Assize is proclaimed to the smiling judge as a happy event, but a virgin Petty Sessions would be a marvel indeed, and interested officials would wear sour looks if such were frequently repeated. This is a subject which, if opportunity occur, we may devote such attention to as it deserves ; allusion has already been made to some peculiar features, and nothing further need now be said than that those modern instances are sketched faithfully from "the life." The same remark may be made with respect to great Estates having each a pocket borough tacked on as a valuable appanage,—a subject so prolific cannot be adequately dealt with here ; suffice it to say the present writer has had a long and intimate acquaintance with such matters, and his conviction is that while the good those Estates do could be as well achieved by other means, their evils are manifold and all their own. There is one sharp remedy for some of those evils which ought to be promptly applied ;—abolish AGENCY. The laws and time-honoured usages which attach to Land the privileges of game *plus* rent, administration of justice, and corruption of voters, have no foundation in morality.

Secondly, the Farmer. There is at the present time a manifestation of mental activity among the agriculturists of this country such as has never before been known. Their activity during the severe agitation which led to the repeal of the Corn Laws was less intense, while its object was less legitimate. The change of front forced upon



them by the portentous wheat fertility of the vast prairies of Minnesota and other Western American States has turned their gaze inwards, and the admirable spirit manifested by their leaders proves them fully alive to the situation. The British farmer *this* time is on the right scent, and he may safely be let alone to press on to a satisfactory conclusion. When capital and skill can be invested in agriculture, and withdrawn with the same freedom and certainty as in other pursuits, then, and then only, will the metal of our farmers and farm lands be fairly put to the proof. Nor, with a proper spirit of self-reliance on the part of the farmers, is the issue doubtful.

Lastly, the Labourer. It is to be feared that during a temporary lull many of the best and brightest of our toilers are stealing away to distant shores. If our fields are to smile again—as smile undoubtedly they will—there must be a greater expenditure of manual labour upon them than there has been for the last few seasons. The process of starving the land, a mistake at any time, will cease with returning prosperity, and it is therefore of vital importance that a generous and conciliatory spirit should be manifested in our dealings with the labouring classes. I would revive the law of settlement, and even again place the rural labourer in bondage—but not with fetters of iron, nor yet even with a torque of gold about his neck would I bind him ; but I would tie him to his native fields by the cords of his heart ! Let it not be supposed that I am formulating the complaints of the labourers ; I have no official commission to do so, and merely record the impressions of one having unusual opportunities for observation ; but of this I am certain—the desire of the labourer to possess a plot of

land is intense and universal ; such a desire is natural and rational, and it ought to be gratified. If the best of our labouring population could be settled upon our own soil, in some such manner as I shall immediately describe, all else that is desirable would naturally follow. That all, and more than all, the reforms I have suggested, rather than defined, will inevitably come to pass I verily believe ; but at present I deem it right to admit there is no wide-spread complaint as to the dispensation of Justice, though there are grim comments in quiet corners here and there. It is the silent submissiveness in this and other matters which so deeply stirs one's pity ; were a more enlightened class to be habitually dealt with as the poor labouringman so constantly is, what an outcry there would be !—complaints both loud and deep, leading up to speedy reform. In the true case alluded to in a previous chapter,\* an inoffensive, industrious, honest labourer was fined one shilling (apologetically—he being, in fact, innocent) with *nine shillings costs*, a penalty which in the case of a well-to-do-tradesman would be proportionately represented by a fine of ten pounds, and yet no tittle of comment or observation was aroused. The thing is trivial and commonplace, and thousands such occur which never so much as ruffle for one moment the placid surface of public opinion.

The ideal Agricultural Settlement I would propose, not attempting to define the various phases such a scheme might assume, and without venturing too far into Utopia, would be a return to the solid conditions of Anglo-Saxon and Early Norman times, with added grace of our own more advanced culture. Suppose, as the choicest type (among many others that might be suggested), some

\* V. pp. 303-4, *ante*.

considerable acreage, say eight hundred acres of farmland, to be thrown upon the hands of an aristocratic landowner. Let the noble himself, if poor, or a younger son, or brother, accept the position of a yeoman—that special condition of country gentleman which the greedy power of great wealth has absorbed too much—thus happily defined by old authorities, *a free-born Englishman who hath land of his own and liveth on good husbandry*. Such an one, dispensing with the doubtful aid of agents and bailiffs, and applying himself to master the technical part of his business, while blessed with the wisdom to imbibe the perennial poetry of rural life, and the will to cultivate the sympathies of those around him, might not only demonstrate the full capacity of high-class English farming as a source of wealth, but himself possess, and as a central sun reflect to others, real happiness such as no other kind of life can afford.

On preliminary survey of the “outer bounds” of our Model Farm, wherever fringing soil of inferior quality might be found, it would be set out and planted, so that a ring-fence should encircle us, widening here and there to bushy “double,” or swelling out to hanging coppice, to serve as fit harbour for insect and seed eating birds, grub-destroying rooks, and modest store of game; for we should be game-preservers, though not in the spirit of forest *law*, but as honest gentlemen, fond of the gun. Along the highest land a brook should run, if possible, not only as home of speckled trout, but to serve the useful purpose of irrigation—an ancient art of husbandry practised in the East, but not sufficiently accounted in our humid climate, though occasional months of drought wither our crops. In suitable situation for growth of grass, one or two ten-acre dairy

farms would be fenced off, and wherever most convenient, bordering on footpaths, the farm-road, or the adjoining highway, one-acre and two-acre plots of garden ground would be marked out symmetrically, there to be occupied and cultivated as will presently be described. Upon suitable vantage ground—a swelling knoll about the centre of our farm, or a sloping lawn in a southern angle—wherever from easy-benched bay-window and peeping oriel good view of the estate could be had, we would build our Grange, with bartons, byres and barns, not far off. Convenient to the Grange, and near to it should the soil be suitable, but if otherwise then at some point more remote, should be a woodland of some hundred acres, not to lie idle, but at convenient seasons producing a crop of coppice-wood useful for various rural economies, with occasional fall of stout oak and resinous fir for building purposes ; and here the cock-pheasant should crow securely, and, perchance, in sandy earth a bitch-fox might rear her frolicsome litter. Our hazel bushes should yield store of brown-shell nuts, a walled warren juicy meat for savoury pasties, and a stew-pond silver eels and golden tench. A garden also we would have wherein should grow all culinary herbs and vegetables, and whatever fruit our climate ripens best without too lavish aid of artificial culture. And all these gifts we would secure by skilled labour of the peasants living on the farm, and of their children, at one-half the usual cost of such things, and priceless gain of mental health to the poor ; the initiative ideas on all subjects connected with agriculture, gardening, and woodcraft, together with loving thoughts of bird and beast, being to be gained at the Village School, in lieu of “extra” crudities in ologies and isms.

All needful handicrafts, also, should be practised on the Farm with aid of necessary simple appliances, so that it might no longer with truth be said, there is no peasantry in all Europe so shiftless as the English.

A great breadth of arable land, some three or four hundred acres in extent, should spread without interruption of cross-fence or tree about the centre of the farm, whereon the steam-plough and all improved agricultural implements could easily operate ; good tilth being assured by constant working and endless succession of crops, and fertility by liberal application of solid manure from byres and bartons : wherein stock should diligently increase and multiply, and fatten healthily for market. Nor would the energy of stout horses be wanting ; nor even the patient toil of labouring ox when time and circumstances would allow—such labour being time-honoured and economical, and ox-beef a specific for ripening the blood of true-born Britons.

Our Farm Buildings should be built of materials native to the spot, whether wood or stone or brick, and be thatched with produce of the estate—honest wheaten straw, beneath which equable shelter cattle lie contented, and fatten well. The labourers' Cottages should not differ much from the farm-buildings ; roofs high-pitched, with mellow shute of thatch, and blinking casements letting the morning air to lowly beds (pressed only by sound sleepers at midnight) and slender tuns cutting the summer blue, or spuming pungent smoke across the wintry sky. The great Grange, with wide-flagged Hall recalling seventh Henry days, with business-room for the Master,

and boudoir and parlor for the ladies, should be only a more ornate illustration of the same pervading type,—built rather for solid use than ornament, yet redolent of a certain homely grace beyond the forced efforts of the man of taste. Here our modern farmer might dwell in comfort, on

— “a thousand a year estate,”

(or two, or ten—as the case might be), claiming kin-ship, by direct descent from Saxon eorldeorman, with continental boyar and seigneur and all other brave types of agricultural head-ship; blest with ability and means to exercise an honest influence for good, and with safe scope for expansion, beyond the reach of present estimate.

Our Farm-labourers should be ceorls or villeins, save that (only under such mutual understanding between master and man as would reasonably restrain the like parties in other business), they should be free to go elsewhere if they so wished. These should be located in the cottages upon the little one-acre and two-acre plots, at a moderate rental and yearly tenancy, free to cultivate their ground and to develop its fertility to the utmost extent, instead of being restricted, as is usually the case upon farm allotments by the mistaken jealousy of the farmer, to one starved annual crop of potatoes; the understanding being that they should receive from the Master abundant supply of manure—that constant difficulty of small cultivators—with compensatory advantage to the Master of “first refusal,” as the rustic phrase goes, at “spending price,” of all surplus produce from the cottage gardens. By an arrangement of this nature there would be located on the farm a large supply of labour, partly self-supporting, partly dependent

upon wages, at a minimum fixed rate, to be received from the Master for labour done. And here two great advantages would ensue to the Farmer, the labour would be better, more cheerful, more earnest, like the labour of "*John*" the Irishman,\* while such waste would be avoided as commonly occurs on large farms under the ordinary system: either by being under-manned, and so lowered in fertility, or from payment of wages for recurrent idle time of full complement of men. The ordinary demand for labour on a farm is intermittent; and the advantage is obvious of having a number of stalwart willing hands earning profitable wages on all emergencies (as during the press of seed-time and harvest) but self-supporting during slack times.

To the labourer, personally and socially, the advantage of such a proposed change would be incalculable. To take him from the present sordid life of the worst of his class, and plunge him into the griping cares of the naked ten or twenty-acre occupier, would be to confer upon him a doubtful advantage; but to place him in such a position as is shadowed forth in our scheme of a Model Farm, would be to raise him from a condition less endowed with hope—that pleasantest spring of human energy—than was the state of the primitive savage at "*Pen-pits*," to a life of gradually expanding usefulness, not more beneficial to himself than to the commonwealth.

Into description of further advantages (certain to accrue, as we fondly think, and always devoutly to be wished) that may be destined to grow and blossom from such a germ as this Model Farm, it is bootless now to enter; yet one or two may be briefly indicated.

\* V. p. 247, *ante*.

A Common Hall, standing in a recreation ground, where folk-mote should be held, at which all questions respecting price of commodities and labour should be decided : the minimum value (something below approximate market-price) always being fixed, with over-plus to be paid to a common fund wherewith to ensure against positive loss, or lapse of profit in bad seasons, and also to provide sustenance for the aged and infirm. Here, keeping within the limits of imperial law, all light offences might be cheaply tried, and punishment of fine to the common fund awarded. By general adoption of such means as this a gradual lightening of the burdens upon land might be effected, through lessened use, or even final extinction, of County Jails, Lunatic Asylums, and Union Workhouses. Here the stout freemen, in rare intervals of leisure, might throw a fourteen pound skittle-ball, or deftly jerk a seven-pound quoit ; and the curate of the parish, being a man of muscle, with *nous* to expound his creed withal, might fitly join them on occasion. Here, also, any public lecturer, or errant M.P., on the eve of parliamentary election, might be invited to expound his views ; but should a sneaking canvasser intrude his cloven foot, he might forthwith be made acquainted with the swimming-bath.

Nor should the dames and lasses be neglected, for on convenient sward or floor, according to the season, music and dancing should prevail ; not often of set purpose, but oftener when light-hearted leisure should inspire, notably when blinking walls would smile with tawny wreaths of harvest or coral berries of Christmas-tide : so that again might throb with innocent gaiety the now too shrunken veins of "Merrie England."



And if from many centres of good living, such as this one we have faintly sketched, slowly but surely a manly faith might spread, able to lift and pierce the lowering pall of infidelity, so that loving light of God might shine through, all the better for us as a People !

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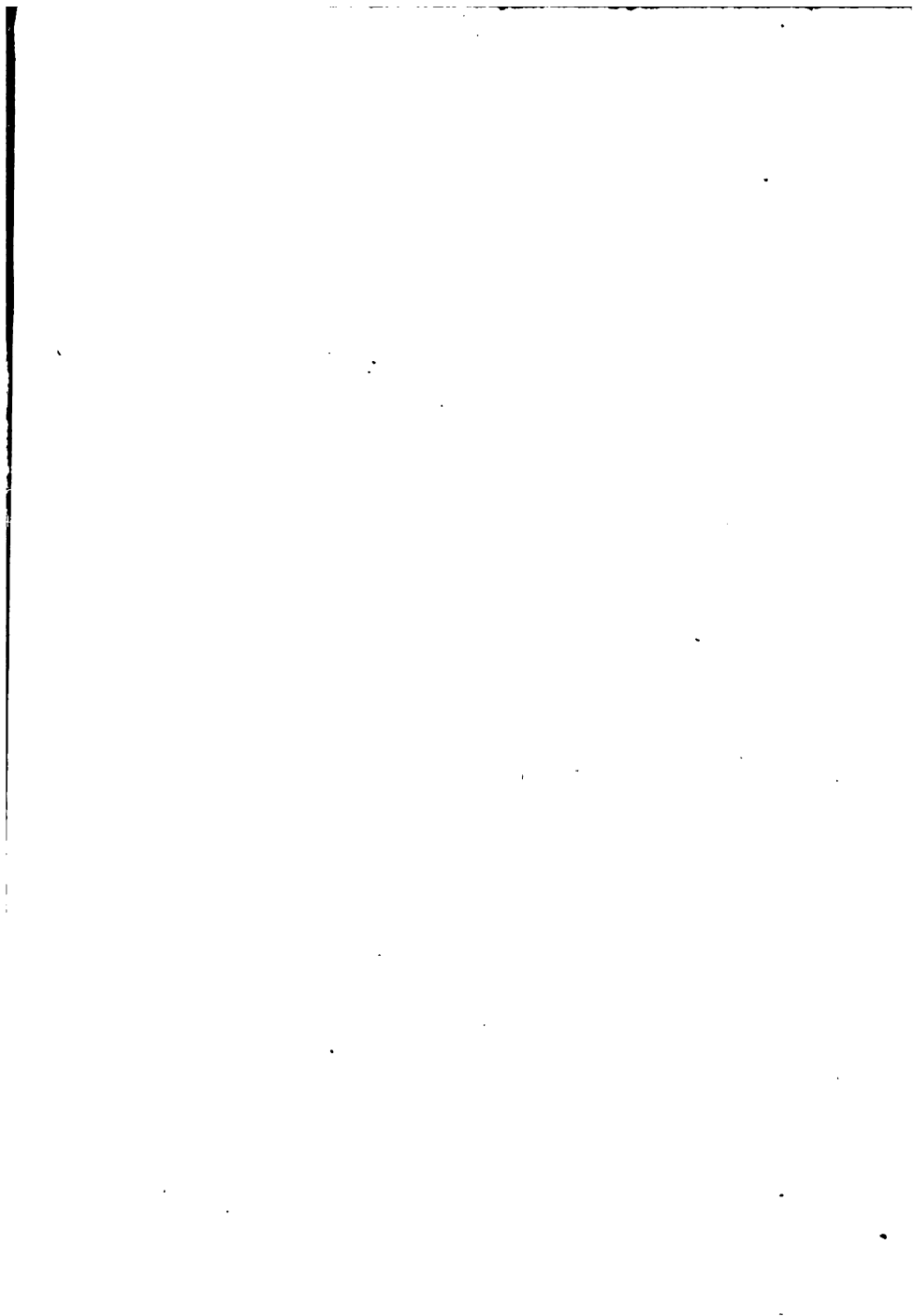
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